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THE

WORKS

OF

DR. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY

THO^{s}. BIRCH, M. A.

ALSO,

A COPIOUS INDEX, AND THE TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE CAREFULLY COMPARED.

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SERMONS.

SERMON LXXXV.

THE SIN AND DANGER OF ADDING TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.—GAL. i. 8, 9.

BEFORE I come to handle the words, for the better understanding of them, I shall give a brief account of the occasion of them, which was this:—some false apostles had made a great disturbance in the churches planted by the apostles of Christ, by teaching that it was necessary for Christians, not only to embrace and entertain the doctrines and precepts of the Christian religion, but likewise to be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses. Of this disturbance, which was raised in the Christian church, you have the history at large, Acts xv. and as in several other churches, so particularly in that of Galatia, these false apostles and seducers had perverted many, as appears by this Epistle; in the

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beginning whereof St. Paul complains, that those who were seduced into this error, of the necessity of circumcision, and keeping the law of Moses, had, by this new article of faith, which they had added to the Christian religion, quite altered the frame of it, and made the gospel another thing from that which our Saviour delivered, and commanded his apostles to teach all nations.

For he tells us (ver. 6. of this chapter), that he "marvelled, that they were so soon removed from him that called them by (or through) the grace of Christ, unto another gospel," that is so different from that which they had been instructed in by those who first preached the gospel unto them: for the making of any thing necessary to salvation, which our Saviour in his gospel had not made so, he calls another gospel. "I marvel, that ye are so soon removed from him that called you by the grace of Christ, unto another gospel; which is not another," ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, which is no other thing, or by which I mean nothing else, "but that there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ;" as if he had said, When I say that ye are removed to another gospel, I do not mean that ye have renounced Christianity, and are gone over to another religion; but that ye are seduced by those who have a mind to pervert the gospel of Christ, by adding something to it, as a necessary and essential part of it, which Christ hath not made so: this the apostle calls a perverting or overthrowing of the gospel; because, by thus altering the terms and conditions of it, they made it quite another thing from what our Saviour delivered it.

And then at the eighth and ninth verses he denounceth a terrible anathema against those, who-

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ever they should be, yea, though it were an apostle, or an angel from heaven, who by thus "perverting the gospel of Christ" (that is, by making any thing necessary to be believed or practised, which our Saviour in his gospel hath not made so), should in effect "preach another gospel;"—"but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema," an accursed thing. And then, to express his confidence and vehemency in this matter, and to shew that he did not speak this rashly and in a heat, but upon due consideration, he repeats it again in the next verse, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

From the words thus explained by the consideration of the context, and of the main scope and design of this Epistle, these following observations do naturally arise:

First, That the addition of any thing to the Christian religion, as necessary to be believed and practised in order to salvation, is a perverting the gospel of Christ, and preaching another gospel.

Secondly, That no pretence of infallibility is sufficient to authorize and warrant the addition of any thing to the Christian doctrine, as necessary to be believed and practised in order to salvation.

Thirdly, That Christians may judge and discern when such additions are made.

Fourthly, and consequently, That since the declaration of the gospel, and the confirmation of it, there is no authority in the Christian church to impose upon Christians any thing as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so.

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Fifthly, That there is no visible judge (how infallible soever he may pretend to be) to whose definitions and declarations in matters of faith and practice, necessary to salvation, we are bound to submit, without examination, whether these things be agreeable to the gospel of Christ, or not.

Sixthly, and lastly, Whosoever teacheth any thing as of necessity to salvation, to be believed or practised, besides what the gospel of Christ hath made necessary, doth fall under the anathema here in the text, because, in so doing, he perverteth the gospel of Christ, and preacheth another gospel. Now the apostle expressly declares, that "though we (that is, he himself, or any of the apostles), or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than what we have preached unto you, let him be accursed; as we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

I. That the addition of any thing to the Christian religion, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to salvation, is a perverting of the gospel of Christ, and preaching another gospel.

This is evident from the instances here given in this Epistle; for the apostle chargeth the false apostles with perverting the gospel of Christ, and preaching another gospel, upon no other account, but because they added to the Christian religion, and made circumcision, and the keeping of the law of Moses, an essential part of the Christian religion, and imposed upon Christians the practice of these things, and the belief of the necessity of them, as a condition of eternal salvation.

That this was the doctrine of those false teachers, we find expressly: (Acts xv. 1.) "And certain

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men which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved;" and (ver. 24.) in the letter written by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, to the churches abroad, there is this account given of it; "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying ye must be circumcised, and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment." Where you see that this doctrine is declared to be of pernicious consequence, tending to subvert the souls of men, and likewise to be an addition to the doctrine of the gospel which was delivered by the apostles, who here with one consent declare, that they had given "no such commandment;" that is, had delivered no such doctrine as this, nor put any such yoke upon the necks of Christians; but on the contrary had declared, that the death of Christ having put an end to the Jewish dispensation, there was now no obligation upon Christians to observe the law of Moses.

And from the reason of the thing it is very plain, that the addition of any thing to the Christian religion, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so, is preaching another gospel; because it makes an essential change in the terms and conditions of the gospel-covenant, which declares salvation unto men upon such and such terms, and no other. Now to add any other terms to these, as of equal necessity with them, is to alter the condition of the covenant of the gospel, and the terms of the Christian religion, and consequently to preach another gospel, by declaring other terms of salvation, than Christ in his

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gospel hath declared, which is to pervert the gospel of Christ.

II. No pretence of infallibility is sufficient to authorize and warrant the addition of any thing to the Christian doctrine, as necessary to be believed or practised, in order to salvation. After the delivery of the gospel by the Son of God, and the publication of it to the world by his apostles, who were commissioned and inspired by him to that purpose, and the confirmation of all, by the greatest and most unquestionable miracles that ever were, no person whatever that brought any other doctrine, and declared salvation to men on any other terms than those which are declared in the gospel, was to be credited, what pretence soever he should make to a Divine commission or an infallible assistance. The apostle makes a supposition as high as can be: "Though we (says he) or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be an anathema." If the apostles themselves, who were divinely commissioned, and infallibly assisted in the preaching of the gospel, should afterwards make any addition to it, or declare any other terms of salvation, than those which are declared in the gospel which they had already published to the world, they ought not to be regarded.

And the reason is plain; because, what claim soever any person may make to infallibility, and what demonstration soever he may give of it, we cannot possibly believe him, if he contradict himself, and deliver doctrines which do plainly clash with one another: for if he spake true at first, I cannot believe him, declaring the contrary afterwards: and if he did not speak true at first, I cannot believe

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him at all; because he can give no greater proof of his Divine commission, and infallible assistance and inspiration, than he did at first.

And the reason is the same, if an angel from heaven should come and preach a contrary doctrine to that of the gospel, he were not to be believed neither; because he could bring no better credentials of his Divine commission and authority, than those had who published the gospel; and, consequently, he ought not to be credited in any thing contrary to what they had published before. For though a man were never so much disposed to receive a revelation from God, and to submit his faith to it, yet it is not possible for any man to believe God against God himself; that is, to believe two revelations, plainly contradictory to one another, to be from God; and the reason of this is very obvious, because every man doth first, and more firmly, believe this proposition or principle, that contradictions cannot be true, than any revelation whatsoever; for if contradictions may be true, then no revelation from God can signify any thing, because the contrary may be equally true, and so truth and falsehood be all one.

The apostle indeed only makes a supposition, when he says, "though we or an angel from heaven preach any other doctrine unto you;" but by this supposition he plainly bars any man, or company of men, from adding to the Christian religion any article of faith, or point of practice, as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so: I say, any man, or company of men, whatever authority or infallibility they may lay claim to; because they cannot pretend to a clearer commission, and greater evidence of infallible assistance, than an

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apostle, or an angel from heaven, and yet the text tells us, that would not be a sufficient warrant to preach another gospel; it might, indeed, bring in question that which they had preached before, but could not give credit and authority to any thing plainly contrary to it, and inconsistent with it.

III. Christians may judge and discern when another gospel is preached, when new articles of faith, or points of practice not enjoined by the gospel, are imposed upon Christians. This the apostle supposeth every particular church, and, for aught I know, every particular Christian, that is duly instructed in the Christian religion, to be a competent judge of, and to be sufficiently able to discern when another gospel is preached, and new terms and conditions, not declared in the gospel, are added to the Christian religion; for if they be not able to judge of this, the apostle does in vain caution them against the seduction of those who perverted the doctrine of Christ, and endeavoured to remove them from him that had called them by the grace of Christ, unto another gospel.

It may perhaps be said, that there was no need that they should be able to discern and judge of the doctrines of those false teachers; it was sufficient for them to believe the apostle concerning the doctrines of those seducers, when he declared to them the falsehood and pernicious consequence of them. But the apostle speaks to them upon another supposition, which does necessarily imply, that they were able to discern and judge what doctrines were agreeable to the gospel, and what not; for he puts the case, that if he himself, or any of the apostles, or an angel from heaven, should preach to them another doctrine, contrary to that of the gospel, they

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ought to reject it with detestation; but this doth necessarily suppose them able to judge, when such doctrines were preached, and consequently, that all things necessarily to be believed and practised by all Christians, are clearly and plainly declared in the gospel; all the doctrines whereof are now contained in the Holy Scriptures, in which all things necessary to faith and a good life are so plainly delivered, that any sober and inquisitive person may learn them from thence: and the meanest capacity, by the help and direction of their guides and teachers, may be instructed in them.

And this is not only the principle of protestants, but the express and constant doctrine of the ancient fathers of the church, whatever the church of Rome, for the maintaining of her usurped authority over the consciences of men, pretends to the contrary. And if this were not so, that men are able to discern and judge which are the doctrines of the gospel and what is contrary to them, the doctrine of the gospel was in vain preached, and the Holy Scriptures containing that doctrine were written to no purpose.

Some things in Scripture are granted to be obscure and difficult, on purpose to exercise the study and inquiries of those who have leisure and capacity for it; but all things necessary are sufficiently plain; otherwise it would be impossible to judge when another gospel is preached, which the apostle here supposeth the Galatians capable of doing. For if the revelation of the gospel be not sufficiently plain, in all things necessary to be believed and practised, then Christians have no rule whereby to judge what doctrines are agreeable to the gospel, and what not, for an obscure rule is of no use; that is, in truth, is no rule to those to whom it is obscure.

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I proceed to the fourth observation, which is plainly consequent from those laid down before; namely, that since the declaration of the gospel, and the confirmation given to it, there is no authority in the Christian church to impose upon Christians any thing, as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so.

The commission given by our Lord and Saviour to his apostles, was to preach the gospel to all nations (or, as St. Matthew expresses it), to go and teach all nations to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them; and this is that which we call the gospel, viz. that doctrine which Christ commanded to preach and publish to the world; and, if the apostles themselves had exceeded their commission, and added any other points of faith or practice to those which our Saviour gave them in charge to teach and publish to the world, they had, in so doing, been guilty of that which St. Paul here in the text chargeth the false apostles with, viz. of preaching another gospel. And if the apostles had no authority to add any thing to the gospel, much less can any others pretend to it, since they have neither so immediate a commission, nor such a miraculous power to give testimony to them, that "they are teachers come from God."

Now this doctrine of the gospel, which the apostles preached to the world, is that which Christians are so often, and so earnestly by the apostles in all their epistles, exhorted to continue in, and not to suffer themselves to be shaken in mind by every wind of new doctrine; because that which the apostles had delivered to them, was the entire doctrine of the gospel, which was never to receive any addition or alteration. This is that which St. Peter

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calls "the holy commandment which was delivered unto them." (2 Pet. ii. 21.) "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them;" speaking, in all probability, of those who were seduced by the errors of the Gnostics, from the purity of the Christian doctrine delivered to them by the apostles. This, likewise, St. Paul calls "the common faith;" (Titus i. iv.) and St. Jude, (ver 3.) "the common salvation;" that is, the doctrine which contains the common terms of our salvation, and "the faith which was once delivered to the saints;" that is, by the apostles of our Lord, who published the gospel; once delivered, that is, once for all, so as never afterwards to admit of any change or alteration. This faith he exhorts Christians "earnestly to contend for," against those several sects of seducers, which were crept into the Christian church, and did endeavour, by several arts, to pervert the gospel of Christ, and to deprave the faith delivered by the apostles.

So that the doctrine of the gospel published by the apostles is fixed and unalterable; and there can be no authority in the church to make any change in it, either by taking from it, or adding any thing to it, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to salvation.

5. It follows likewise from the foregoing observations, that there is no visible judge (how much soever he may pretend to infallibility), to whose determination and decision, in matters of faith and practice necessary to salvation, Christians are bound to submit, without examination, whether those things be agreeable to the doctrine of the gospel, or not.

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When our Saviour appeared in the world, though he had authority enough to exact belief from men, yet, because there was a standing revelation of God made to the Jews, he appeals to that revelation, as well as to his own miracles, for the truth of what he said, and offered himself and his doctrine to be tried by the agreeableness of it to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and the predictions therein concerning him. And this was but reasonable; it being impossible for any man to receive two revelations, as from God, without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to, and consistent with, one another. In like manner the apostles of our Lord and Saviour, though they were guided and assisted by an infallible Spirit, and had an immediate commission from Christ to preach the doctrine of the gospel, did not require from men absolute submission to their doctrines and dictates, without examination of what they delivered, whether it were agreeable to that Divine revelation which was contained in the ancient Scriptures.

This was St. Paul's constant custom and way of teaching among the Jews, who had received the revelation of the Old Testament; he did not dictate to them by virtue of his infallibility, "but reasoned with them out of the Scriptures," and required their belief no further than what he said should, upon examination, appear agreeable to the Scriptures. So we find, Acts xvii. 2, 3. "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them (speaking of the Jews), and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is the Christ." And (chap. xviii. 28.) "he

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mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing, by the Scriptures, that Jesus was the Christ." And St. Paul was so far from reproving them for examining his doctrine by the Scriptures, that he commended it, as an argument of a noble and generous mind in the Bereans, that they did not give full assent to his doctrine, till, upon due search and examination, they were satisfied that what he had said was agreeable to the Scriptures, (chap. xvii. 11, 12.) where, speaking of the Bereans, it is said, "That these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word, with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so; therefore many of them believed;" that is, because upon search they found what he delivered to be agreeable to the Scriptures; and it was not a slight, but diligent and deliberate search, they took time to examine things thoroughly; for it is said, "they searched the Scriptures daily." And here, in the text, St. Paul puts the case, that if he, or any other of the apostles, concerning whose Divine commission and assistance they were so fully satisfied, should deliver any thing to them contrary to the gospel, which they had formerly preached, they were to reject it with the greatest abhorrence and detestation; and this necessarily supposeth a liberty to examine what was delivered, even by those whom they believed to be infallibly assisted, and a capacity to discern and judge whether what they said was agreeable to the gospel at first delivered to them or not.

And, after this, shall any person or church (what claim soever they may make to infallibility), assume to themselves an authority to dictate in matters of faith, and that their dictates ought to be received

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with an absolute submission, and without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to "the faith once delivered to the saints;" and though they add new articles to the Christian faith, and of which there is not the least footstep or intimation in any of the ancient creeds of the Christian church, and do plainly impose upon Christians the practice and belief of several things as necessary to salvation, which the gospel never declared to be so, yet nobody shall judge of this, but every man ought, without more ado, to believe blindfold, and to resign up his understanding and judgment to the directions of this infallible judge?

But surely this is not the reasonable obedience of faith, but the forced submission of slaves to the tyranny of their masters. Christians are expressly forbid to call any man father or master upon earth, because we have one Father and Master in heaven. Now to make an absolute submission of our understandings to any upon earth, so as, without examination, to receive their dictates in matters of faith, is surely, if any thing can be so, to call such a person father or master, because a greater submission than this we cannot pay to our Father who is in heaven, even to God himself. I come now to the

Sixth and last observation from the text; that whosoever teacheth any thing, as of necessity to salvation to be believed or practised, besides what the gospel of Christ hath made necessary, does fall under the anathema here in the text; because they that do so, do, according to the mind of St. Paul, pervert the gospel of Christ, and preach another gospel. For the reason why he chargeth the false apostles with preaching another gospel, and those that were seduced by them, as being "removed from

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him that called them by the grace of Christ unto another gospel," is plainly this—that they had changed the terms of the Christian religion, by adding new articles to it which were not contained in the gospel; that is, by making it necessary to believe it to be so, because they taught so. Now St. Paul expressly declares this to be "preaching another gospel," because they plainly altered the terms of salvation declared in the gospel, and made that to be necessary to the salvation of men, which the gospel had not made so.

And whatever person or church does the same, does incur the same guilt, and falls under the anathema and censure here in the text; yea, though he were an apostle, or an angel; and I am sure no bishop or church in the world can pretend either to an equal authority or infallibility with an apostle, or an angel from heaven.

Let us then hear what St. Paul declares in this case, and consider seriously with what earnestness and vehemency he declares it: "Though we (says he) or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed." St. Paul, you see, is very earnest in this matter, and very peremptory; and therefore I cannot but think this declaration of his to be more considerable, and every way more worthy of our regard and dread, than all the anathemas of the council of Trent, which, in direct affront and contempt of this anathema of St. Paul, hath presumed to add so many articles to the Christian religion, upon the counterfeit warrant of tradition, for which there is

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no ground or warrant from the Scripture, or from any ancient creed of the Christian church.

And, for the truth of this, I appeal to the creed of Pope Pius IV. compiled out of the definitions of the council of Trent; by which council, the pope only is authorized to interpret the true sense and meaning of the canons and decrees of that council; and, consequently, his interpretations must be of equal force and authority with that of the council itself. So that whatsoever he hath put into his new creed for an article of faith, ought to be received with the same pious affection and veneration, as if the creed had been compiled by the council itself; because the pope, it seems, and nobody else, understands the true meaning of that council, at least is thought fit to declare it. And therefore one may justly wonder at the presumption of those, who, after this declaration of the council, have taken upon them to expound the catholic faith, and to represent that religion to us as it is defined in that council; because if there be any controversy about the meaning of its definitions (as there have been a great many, even betwixt those who were present at the council when those definitions were made), none but the pope himself can certainly tell the meaning of them.

Now in this creed of Pope Pius, there are added, to the ancient creed of the Christian church, twelve or thirteen new articles; as concerning purgatory, transubstantiation, the worship of images, the invocation of saints, the communion in one kind, and that the church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all churches, and that there is no salvation to be had out of it, and several other points; all which have either no foundation in Scripture, or are plainly contrary to it, and none of them ever esteemed

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as articles of faith in the ancient Christian church for the first five hundred years; and yet they are now obtruded upon Christians, as of equal necessity to salvation, with the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed; and this under a pretence of infallibility, which St. Paul tells us would not have justified an apostle, or an angel from heaven, in making such additions to the Christian religion, and the imposing any thing as necessary to salvation, which is not so declared by the gospel of Christ.

And all that they have to say for this, is, that we do not pretend to be infallible: but there is a necessity of an infallible judge to decide these controversies, and to him they are to be referred. Which is just as if, in a plain matter of right, a contentious and confident man should desire a reference, and contrive the matter so as to have it referred to himself, upon a sleeveless pretence, without any proof or evidence, that he is the only person in the world that hath authority and infallible skill to decide all such differences. Thus the church of Rome would deal with us in things which are as plain as the noon-day; as, whether God hath forbidden the worship of images in the second commandment? whether our Saviour did institute the sacrament in both kinds? whether the people ought not to read the Scriptures, and to have the public service of God in a known tongue? these, and the like, they would have us refer to an infallible judge; and when we ask who he is, they tell us that their church, which hath imposed these things upon Christians, and made these additions to the gospel of Christ, is that infallible judge. But if she were as infallible as she pretends to be, even as an apostle, or an angel from heaven, St. Paul hath denounced an

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anathema against her for preaching another gospel, and making those things necessary to the salvation of men which are not contained in the gospel of Christ.

The inference from all this discourse, in short, is this; that we should "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," and not suffer ourselves, by the confident pretences of seducers, to be removed from him that hath called us through the grace of Christ unto another gospel. The necessary doctrines of the Christian religion, and the common terms of salvation, are so plain, that if any man be ignorant of them it is his own fault; and if any go about to impose upon us any thing as of necessity to be believed and practised in order to salvation, which is not declared to be so in the Holy Scriptures, which contain the true doctrine of the gospel, what authority soever they pretend for it, yea, though they assume to themselves to be infallible; the apostle hath plainly told us what we are to think of them; for he hath put the case as high as is possible here in the text, when he says, "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

I will conclude all with that counsel which the Spirit of God gives to the churches of Asia: (Rev. iii. 3.) "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast;" and, (chap. ii. 10.) "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: be thou faithful unto the death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

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SERMON LXXXVI.

HONESTY THE BEST PRESERVATIVE AGAINST DANGEROUS MISTAKES IN RELIGION.

If any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.—JOHN vii. 17.

SINCE there are so many different opinions and apprehensions in the world about matters of religion, and every sect and party does with so much confidence pretend, that they, and they only, are in the truth; the great difficulty and question is, by what means men may be secured from dangerous errors and mistakes in religion. For this end, some have thought it necessary that there should be an infallible church, in the communion whereof every man may be secured from the dangers of a wrong belief. But it seems God hath not thought this necessary; if he had, he would have revealed this very thing more plainly than any particular point of faith whatsoever. He would have told us expressly, and in the plainest terms, that he had appointed an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith, and would likewise have told us as plainly who he was, and where we might find him, and have recourse to him upon all occasions; because the sincerity of our faith depending upon him, we could not be safe from mistake in particular points, without so plain and clear a revelation of this infallible judge, that there could be no mistake about him; nor could there be an end of any other controversies in reli-

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gion, unless this infallible judge (both that there is one, and who he is) were out of controversy. But neither of these are so: it is not plain, from Scripture, that there is an infallible judge and guide in matters of faith; much less is it plain who he is: and therefore we may certainly conclude, that God hath not thought it necessary that there should be an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith; because he hath revealed no such thing to us: and that bishop, and that church, who only have arrogated infallibility to themselves, have given the greatest evidence in the world to the contrary; and have been detected and stand convinced in the greatest errors: and it is in vain for any man, or company of men, to pretend to infallibility, so long as the evidence that they are deceived is much greater and clearer than any proof they can produce for their infallibility.

If then God hath not provided an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith, there is some other way whereby men may be secured against dangerous and damnable errors in religion, and whereby they may discern truth from imposture, and what doctrines are from God, and what not; and this our Saviour declares to us here in the text, namely, that an honest and sincere mind, and a hearty desire to do the will of God, is the best preservative against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; ἐάν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν. "If any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

There are two dangerous mistakes in religion: to reject any thing which really comes from God; and to receive and entertain any thing which comes from God, which doth not really come from him.

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First, To reject any thing which really comes from God. This mistake the Jews frequently fell into, when they rejected the true prophets which God from time to time sent to them, slighting their message, and persecuting their persons: but they miscarried most fatally and remarkably in their contempt of the true Messias, that great prophet whom they had so long expected, and whom God sent, at last, to bring salvation to them; but when he came, they knew him not, nor would receive him, but used him with all the despite and contempt imaginable, not as a teacher come from God, but as a deceiver and imposter.

Now the danger of rejecting any thing that comes from God consists in this, that it cannot be done without the highest affront to the Divine Majesty. To reject a Divine message or revelation is to oppose God, and fight against him. So our Saviour tells the Jews, that in despising him, they despised him that sent him.

Secondly, There is also another dangerous mistake, on the other hand, in entertaining any thing as a revelation from God, which is not really from him. And this likewise the Jews were frequently guilty of, in receiving the false prophets, which spake in the name of the Lord, when he had not sent them. And this is commonly the temper of those who reject the truth, greedily to swallow error and delusion. So our Saviour tells us of the Jews: (John v. 43.) "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." This prediction of our Saviour's concerning the Jews was fully accomplished; for, after they had rejected him, who gave such abundant evidence that he was the true Messias and a teacher

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sent from God, they received others who really came in their own names, and ran after those who pretended to be the Messias, and were, in great numbers, destroyed with them. And this is very just with God, that those who receive not the truth in the love of it, should be given up to strong delusions, to believe lies.

Now these being the two great dangerous mistakes in religion which men are liable to, my work at this time shall be to shew, how a sincere desire and endeavour to do the will of God, is a security to men against both those dangers; and it will appear to be so, upon these two accounts:

I. Because he, who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and Divine things.

II. Because God's providence is more especially concerned to secure such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes in things which concern their eternal salvation. These shall be the two heads of my following discourse.

First, Because he, who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and Divine things, and that for these two reasons:

1. Because such a person has a truer notion of God and Divine things.

2. Because he is more impartial in his search and inquiry after truth.

1. Because such a person hath a truer notion of God and Divine things.—No man is so likely to have clear and true apprehensions of God, as a good man, because he hath transcribed the Divine per-

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fections in his own mind, and is himself in some measure and degree what God is. And for this reason it is, that the Scripture so often lays the foundation of all Divine knowledge in the practice of religion: (Job xxviii. 28.) "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding:" and, (Psal. cxi. 10.) "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," that is, the principle and foundation of it; "a good understanding have all they that do his commandments:" whereas the vice and lusts of men darken their reason and distort their understandings, and fill the mind with gross and sensual apprehensions of things, and thereby render men unfit to discern those truths which are of a spiritual nature and tendency, and altogether indisposed to receive them. For though the vices of men be properly seated in their wills, and do not possess their understandings, yet they have a bad influence upon them; as fumes and vapours from the stomach are wont to affect the head.

Nothing, indeed, is more natural to the mind and understanding of men, than the knowledge of God; but we may abuse our faculties, and render them unfit for the discerning even of their proper objects.

When men, by wicked practices, have rendered themselves unlike to God, they will not love to retain the knowledge of him in their minds, but will become vain in their imaginations concerning him. What clouds and mists are to the bodily eye, that the lusts and corruptions of men are to the understanding: they hinder it from a clear perception of heavenly things; the pure in heart, they are best qualified for the sight of God.

Now, according as a man's notions of God are, such will be his apprehensions of religion. All re-

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ligion is either natural, or revealed: natural religion consists in the belief of a God, and in right conceptions and apprehensions concerning him, and in a due reverence and observance of him, and in a ready and cheerful obedience to those laws which he hath imprinted upon our nature; and the sum of our obedience consists in our conformity to God, and an endeavour to be like him. For, supposing God to have made no external revelation of his mind to us, we have no other way to know his will, but by considering his nature and our own; and, if so, then he that resembles God most is like to understand him best, because he finds those perfections in some measure in himself, which he contemplates in the Divine nature; and nothing gives a man so sure a notion of things as practice and experience. Every good man is, in some degree, partaker of a Divine nature, and feels that in himself which he conceives to be in God: so that this man does experience what others do but talk of; he sees the image of God in himself, and is able to discourse of him from an inward sense and feeling of his excellency and perfections.

And as for revealed religion, the only design of that is, to revive and improve the natural notions which we have of God, and all our reasonings about Divine revelation are necessarily gathered by our natural notions of religion: and therefore, he that sincerely endeavours to do the will of God, is not apt to be imposed upon by the vain and confident pretences of Divine revelation; but if any doctrine be proposed to him, which pretends to come from God, he measures it by those steady and sure notions which he hath of the Divine nature and perfections; and by those he will easily discern whether

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it be worthy of God or not, and likely to proceed from him: he will consider the nature and tendency of it, and whether it be (as the apostle expresses it) "a doctrine according to godliness;" such as is agreeable to the Divine nature and perfections, and tends to make us like to God: if it be not, though an angel from heaven should bring it, he will not receive it: if it be, he will not reject it upon every idle pretence and frivolous exception that prejudiced and ill-minded men may make against it; but, after he is satisfied of the reasonableness and purity of the doctrine, he will accept of such evidence and confirmation of it, as is fit for God to give to his own revelations; and if the person that brings it hath an attestation of miracles (which is necessary in case it be a new doctrine), and if he carry on no earthly interest and design by it, but does by his life and actions make it evident that he aims at the glory of God and the good of men; in this case a good man, whose mind is free from passion and prejudice, will easily assent that this man's doctrine is of God, and that he does not speak of himself. This was the evidence which our Saviour offered to the Jews in vindication of himself and his doctrine: (John vii. 18.) "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him;" as if he had said, hereby may you distinguish one that really comes from God from an impostor—if any man seek his own glory, you may conclude that God hath not sent him, but whatever he pretends that he speaks of himself; but he who, by his life, and the course of his actions, demonstrates that he seeks the honour of God, and not any interest and advantage of his own, the same is true, and there is

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no unrighteousness in him; that is, no falsehood or design to deceive (for so the word ἀδικία does sometimes signify), you may conclude such an one to be no deceiver or impostor. And if any man sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, he may, by such marks and characters as these, judge of any doctrine that pretends to be from God, whether it be so or not. This is the first reason; because he that sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, hath the truest notion of God and of Divine things.

2. Such a person is more impartial in his search and inquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to discern it from error. He that hath an honest mind, and sincerely endeavours to do the will of God, is not apt to be swayed and biassed by any interest or lust: for his great interest is to please God, and he makes all his other interests and concernments to stoop and yield to that. But if a man be governed by any earthly interest or design, he will measure all things by that; and is not at liberty to entertain any thing that crosses it, and to judge equally of any doctrine that is opposite to his interest. This our Saviour gives for a reason, why the great rabbies and teachers among the Jews did not believe and embrace his doctrine: (John v. 44.) "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?" If men have any other design in religion than to please God, and to advance his honour and glory in the world, no wonder if they be apt to reject the most Divine truths; because these are calculated not to approve us to men, but to God.

And as vain-glory, and a desire of the applause of men, so likewise doth every other lust make a man partial in his judgment of things, and clap a

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false bias upon his understanding, which carries it off from truth, and makes it to lean towards that side of the question which is most favourable to the interest of his lusts. A vicious man is not willing to entertain those truths which would cross and check him in his course: he hath made the truth his enemy, and therefore he thinks himself concerned to oppose it, and rise up against it: the light of it offends him, and therefore he shuts his eyes that he may not see it. Those holy and pure doctrines, which are from God, reprove the lusts of men, and discover the deformity of them; and therefore no wonder if bad men be so hard to be reconciled to them. This account our Saviour likewise gives of the fierce enmity of the Jews to him, and his doctrine: (John iii. 19, 20.) "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil; for every one that hath done evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

The vicious inclinations of men are a dead weight upon their understandings, and able to draw down the scales against the clearest truths: for though it be absolutely in no man's power to believe, or to disbelieve what he will, yet men's lives have many times a great influence upon their understandings, to make assent easy or difficult; and as we are forward to believe what we have a mind to, so are we very backward and slow in yielding our assent to any thing that crosseth our inclinations. Men that allow themselves in ungodliness and worldly lusts, will not easily believe those doctrines which charge men so strictly with all manner of holiness and purity.

This is th e way which the devil hath always used

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to "blind the eyes of men, that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ might not shine into them." And certainly the most effectual way to keep men in infidelity is to debauch them in their lives; therefore the apostle gives this as the reason of the infidelity of men in the last times: (2 Thess. ii. 12.) "They believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." When men once abandon themselves to lewd and vicious practices, infidelity becomes their interest, because they have no other way to defend and excuse a wicked life, but by denying the truth which opposeth it and finds fault with it.

That man only stands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the dominion of no vice or lust; because he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to seduce him, or draw him aside in his inquiry after truth; he hath no interest but to find the truth, and follow it; he is inquiring after the way to heaven and eternal happiness, and he hath the indifferency of a traveller which is not inclined to go this way rather than another; for his concernment is to find out the right way, and to walk in it: such an indifferency of mind hath every good man, who sincerely desires to do the will of God; he stands ready to receive truth, when sufficient evidence is offered to convince him of it; because he hath no manner of concernment that the contrary proposition should be true. As in mathematics, a man is ready to give his assent to any proposition that is sufficiently demonstrated to him, because he hath no inclination or affection to one side of the question more than to the other; all his design and concernment is to find out the truth on which side soever it lies; and he is like to find it, because he is so indifferent and impartial. But if a man be biassed by any lust, and

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addicted to any vicious practice, he is then an interested person, and concerned to be partial in his judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity when the truths of God are proposed to him; because, whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of that doctrine which is so contrary to his inclination and interest. If the affections and interests of men were as deeply concerned, and as sensibly touched, in the truth of mathematical propositions, as they are in the principles of morality and religion, we should find, that, when a proposition stood in their way and lay cross to their interest, though it were never so clearly demonstrated, yet they would raise a dust about it, and make a thousand cavils, and fence even against the evidence of a demonstration; they would palliate their error with all the skill and art they could; and, though the absurdity of it was never so great and palpable, yet they would hold it fast against all sense and reason, and face down mankind in the obstinate defence of it; for we have no reason to doubt, but that they, who in matters of religion will believe directly contrary to what they see, would, if they had the same interests and passions to sway them in the case, believe contrary to the clearest mathematical demonstration; for where there is an obstinate resolution not to be convinced, all the reason and evidence in the world signifies nothing.

Whereas he that is biassed by no passion or interest, but hath an honest mind, and is sincerely desirous to do the will of God, so far as he knows it, is likely to judge very impartially concerning any doctrines that are proposed to him: for, if there be not good evidence that they are from God, he hath

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no reason to deceive himself in giving credit to them; and if there be good evidence that they are Divine, he hath no interest or inclination to reject them; for it being his great design to do the will of God, he is glad of all opportunities to come to the knowledge of it that he may do it.

Thus you see how a sincere desire and endeavour to obey the will of God does secure men against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; because such persons are hereby better disposed to make a right judgment of Divine things, both because they have truer and surer notions of God and religion, and are more impartial in their search and inquiry after truth. This is the first account.

II. Another reason why they, who sincerely desire to do the will of God, have a great security in discerning truth from error, is, because the providence of God is more especially concerned to preserve such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes in things which concern their eternal salvation. When men are of a teachable temper, God loves to reveal himself and his truth to them; and such is an humble and obedient frame of mind: (Psal. xxv. 9.) "The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way." The proper disposition of a scholar is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn is, "what is the good and acceptable will of God," that we may do it, for practice is the end of knowledge. "If you know these things (says our blessed Lord), happy are ye if ye do them." It is necessary to know the will of God; but we are happy only in the doing of it: and if any man be desirous to do the will of God, his goodness is such, that he will take effectual care to secure such an one against dangerous and fatal

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errors. He that hath an honest mind, and would do the will of God if he knew it, God will not suffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be mistaken about it, in any necessary points of faith and practice.

St. Paul is a wonderful instance of the goodness of God in this kind. He was undoubtedly a man of a very honest mind; he had entertained the Jewish religion, as revealed by God, and been bred in it; and out of a blind reverence and belief of his teachers, who rejected Christ and his doctrine, he likewise opposed and persecuted them with a mighty zeal and an honest intention, being verily persuaded (as he himself tells us), that he ought to do what he did against the name of Jesus of Nazareth; he was under a great prejudice upon account of his education, and, according to the heat of his natural temper, transported with great passion: but because he did what he did ignorantly and in unbelief, God was pleased to shew mercy to him, and, in a miraculous manner, to convince him of the truth of that religion which he persecuted. He was sincerely desirous to do the will of God, and therefore God would rather work a miracle for his conversion, than suffer him to go on in so fatal a mistake concerning the Christian religion.

And as the providence of God doth concern itself to secure good men from dangerous errors and mistakes in matters of religion; so by a just judgment he gives up those, who allow themselves in vicious practices, to error and infidelity. And this is the meaning of that passage of the prophet, (Isa. vi. 10.) so often cited by our Saviour, and applied to the Jews, of "making the heart of that people fat, and their ears heavy, and closing their eyes, lest they should understand and be converted." So again,

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(Isa. lxvi. 3, 4.) God threatens the people of Israel, that, because they were wicked and abominable in their lives, he would abandon them, and give them over to a spirit of delusion; "they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations; I also will choose their delusions." God is said to choose those things for us, which he permits us to fall into: so (Rom. i. 28.) God is said to give over the abominable heathen to a reprobate mind. "As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over, εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, to an injudicious and undiscerning mind." When men abandon themselves to wickedness and impiety, God withdraws his grace from them; and, by his secret and just judgment, they are deprived of the faculty of discerning between truth and error, between good and evil. 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11, 12, it is said, that "the man of sin should come with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved:" and that "for this cause God would send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." And it is just with God, that men of vicious inclinations and practices should be exposed to the cheat of the grossest and vilest impostors. God's providence is concerned for men of honest minds, and sincere intentions: but if men take pleasure in unrighteousness, God takes no further care of them, but delivers them up to their own hearts' lusts, to be seduced into all those errors into which their own vain imaginations, and their foolish hearts, are apt to lead them.

Thus have I endeavoured, as briefly as I could,

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to shew, that an honest mind, that sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is the best security against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; both because it disposeth a man to make a true judgment of Divine things, and because the providence of God is more especially concerned for the security of such persons.

There remains an objection to be answered, to which this discourse may seem liable; but this, together with the inferences which may be made from this discourse, I shall refer to another opportunity.

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SERMON LXXXVII.

HONESTY THE BEST PRESERVATIVE AGAINST DANGEROUS MISTAKES IN RELIGION.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.—JOHN vii. 17.

I MADE entrance into these words the last day; in which our Saviour declares to us, that an honest and sincere mind, and a hearty desire and endeavour to do the will of God, is the best security and preservative against dangerous errors and mistakes in matters of religion; ἐάν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν, "If any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

Now there are (I told you) two great mistakes in religion: to reject any thing which really is from God; and to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which is not really from him. And therefore, I proposed, from this text, to shew how a sincere desire and endeavour to do the will of God, is a security to men against both these dangers; namely, upon these two accounts.

First, Because he, who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and Divine things; and that for these two reasons.

I. Because such a person hath a truer notion of God and Divine things. He that resembleth God most is like to understand him best, because he

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finds those perfections, in some measure, in himself, which he contemplates in the Divine nature; and nothing gives a man so sure a notion of things as practice and experience.

II. Because such a person is more impartial in his search and inquiry after truth, and, therefore, more likely to find it, and to discern it from error. That man only stands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the power and dominion of no vice or lust, because he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to seduce him and draw him aside in his inquiry after truth: he hath no manner of concernment that the contrary proposition should be true, having the indifferency of a traveller, and no other interest but to find out the right way to heaven, and to walk in it. But if a man be biassed by any lust, and addicted to any vicious practice, he is then an interested person, and concerned to make a partial judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity when the truths of God are proposed to him; because, whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of those doctrines which are so contrary to his inclination and interest.

Secondly, Another reason why they, who sincerely desire to do the will of God, have a greater security in discerning truth from error, is, because the providence of God is more especially concerned to preserve such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes, in things which concern their eternal salvation. When men are of a teachable temper, of a humble and obedient frame of mind, God loves to reveal himself and his truth to them; (Psal. xxv. 9.) "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." The proper dispo-

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sition of a scholar is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn, is, "what is the good and acceptable will of God, that we may do it;" for practice is the end of knowledge: "If ye know these things (saith our Saviour) happy are ye if ye do them." It is necessary to know the will of God, but we are only happy in the doing of it; and if any man be desirous to do the will of God, his goodness is such that he will take effectual care to secure such an one against dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honest mind, and would do the will of God if he knew it, God will not suffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be mistaken about it in any necessary point of faith or practice. Thus far I have gone.

I shall now proceed to remove an objection, to which this discourse may seem liable, and then draw some inferences from the whole.

After all that hath been said, some, perhaps, may ask, Is every good man secure from all error and mistake in matters of religion? This is a mighty privilege indeed: but do not we find the contrary in experience? that an honest heart and a weak head do often meet together?

For answer to this, I shall lay down these following propositions:

First, That if there were any necessity that a good man should be secured from all manner of error and mistake in religion, this probity of mind, and sincere desire to do the will of God, is the best way to do it; because such a temper and disposition of mind gives a man the best advantages to discern betwixt truth and error, and God is most likely to reveal his will to such persons. But there is no necessity of this, because a man may be a good man,

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and go to heaven, notwithstanding a great many mistakes in religion about things not necessary. For while we are in this imperfect state, "we know but in part," and see many things very imperfectly: but when we shall come into a more perfect state, "that which is imperfect shall be done away;" the light of glory shall scatter all those mists and clouds which are now upon our understandings, and hinder us from a clear sight and judgment of things: we shall then see God, and other things, as they are; and be freed from all that ignorance, and those many childish mistakes, which we are liable to here below; and till then, it is not necessary that we should be secured from them. Humility, under a sense of our ignorance, is better for us than infallibility would be.

Secondly, This temper and disposition of mind which I have been speaking of, is a certain security against fatal mistakes in religion, and a final continuance in such errors as would prove damnable; and this is all that this discourse pretends to, or our Saviour hath promised in this text. And considering the goodness of God, nothing is more improbable, than that an honest mind that seeks impartially after truth should miss of it, in things that are fundamentally necessary to salvation. And if we could suppose such a man to fall into such an error, either it would not be fundamental to him, having not been, perhaps, proposed to him with sufficient evidence, and would be forgiven him upon a general repentance for all sins and errors known or unknown, or he would not be permitted to continue in it; but the providence of God would find out some way or other to convince him of his error, and to bring him to the acknowledgment of the

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truth, that he might be saved. God would rather speak to him immediately from heaven (as he did to St. Paul), than suffer him to continue in such an error as would infallibly carry him to hell.

Thirdly, There is no such depth of judgment and subtilty of wit required, to discern between gross and damnable errors in religion, and necessary and saving truth, but that an ordinary capacity may be able to do it. There is so plain a line drawn between great truth and gross errors, that it is visible to every capacity; and an ordinary understanding, that is not under a violent prejudice, or blinded by some vice or fault of the will, may easily discern it. Indeed, in matters of lesser moment or concernment, and which have no such considerable and immediate influence upon the practice of a holy life, the difference betwixt truth and error is not always so gross and sensible as to be obvious to every unprejudiced eye. But we have all the reason in the world to believe, that the goodness and justice of God is such, as to make nothing necessary to be believed by any man, which, by the help of due instruction, may not be made sufficiently plain to a common understanding. God hath so tender a care of good men, who sincerely love him and his truth, that we may reasonably presume, that he will not leave them under an unavoidable mistake concerning those matters upon which their eternal salvation does depend. The Judge of all the world will do right; and then we may certainly conclude, that he will not condemn any man for no fault, and make him for ever miserable, for falling into an error, which, with all his care and diligence, he could not possibly either discern or avoid.

Fourthly, God hath made abundant provision for

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our security from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, by these three ways:

I. By an infallible rule, sufficiently plain in all things necessary.

II. By sufficient means of instruction to help us to understand this rule.

III. By an infallible promise of security from dangerous errors and mistakes, if, with an honest mind and due diligence, we apply ourselves to understand this rule, and make use of the means of instruction which God hath provided for that purpose.

I. God hath given us an infallible rule, sufficiently plain in all things necessary. He hath given us the Holy Scriptures, which were given at first by Divine inspiration; *i. e.* by men infallibly assisted in the writing of them, and therefore must needs be an infallible rule; and all Scripture divinely inspired, "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," as St. Paul tells us, 2 Tim. iii. 16. speaking there of the books of the Old Testament; and there is the same reason as to the inspired writings of the New.

Now, if the Scriptures be an infallible rule, and "profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness;" *i. e.* to teach us to believe and do; it follows of necessity that they are sufficiently plain in all things necessary to faith and a good life, otherwise they could not be useful "for doctrine and instruction in righteousness;" for a rule that is not plain to us in these things, in which it is necessary for us to be directed by it, is of no use to us; that is, in truth, it is no rule. For a rule must have these two properties; it must be perfect, and it must be plain. The Scriptures are a perfect rule, because

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the writers of them, being Divinely inspired, were infallible. And they must likewise be plain; otherwise, though they be never so perfect, they can be of no more use to direct our faith and practice, than a sun-dial in a dark room is to tell us the hour of the day; for though it be never so exactly made, unless the sun shine clearly upon it, we had as good be without it. A rule that is not plain to us, whatever it may be in itself, is of no use at all to us, till it be made plain and we understand it.

II. God hath likewise provided sufficient means of instruction to help us to understand this rule. It is not necessary that a rule should be so plain that we should perfectly understand it at first sight; it is sufficient, if it be so plain that those of better capacity and understanding may, with due diligence and application of mind, come to the true knowledge of it, and those of a lower and more ordinary capacity by the help and instruction of a teacher. Euclid's "Elements" is a book sufficiently plain to teach a man geometry; but yet not so plain that any man at first reading should understand it perfectly; but that, by diligent reading, by a due application, and steady attention of mind, a man of extraordinary sagacity and understanding may come to understand the principles and demonstrations of it; and those of a more ordinary capacity, with the help of a teacher, may come to the knowledge of it. So, when we say that the Scriptures are plain, in all things necessary to faith and a good life, we do not mean that every man, at first hearing or reading of these things in it, shall perfectly understand them; but, by diligent reading and consideration, if he be of good apprehension and capacity, he may come to a sufficient knowledge of them; and if he

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be of a meaner capacity, and be willing to learn, he may, by the help of a teacher, be brought to understand them without any great pains; and such teachers God hath appointed in his church for this very purpose, and a succession of them to continue to the end of the world.

In a word, when we say the Scriptures are plain to all capacities, in all things necessary, we mean, that any man of ordinary capacity, by his own diligence and care, in conjunction with the helps and advantages which God hath appointed, and in the due use of them, may attain to the knowledge of every thing necessary to his salvation; and that there is no book in the world more plain, and better fitted to teach a man any art or science, than the Bible is, to direct and instruct men in the way to heaven; and it is every man's fault if he be ignorant of any thing necessary for him to believe, or do, in order to his eternal happiness.

III. Good men are likewise secured from fatal errors in religion, by the infallible promise of God, if so be that, with honest minds and due diligence, they apply themselves to the understanding of this rule, and make use of the means of instruction which God hath provided for that purpose. God hath promised to guide and "teach the humble and meek;" that is, such as are of a submissive and teachable temper, desirous and diligent to be instructed in the truth. (Prov. ii. 2, 3, 4, 5.) "If thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

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And here, in the text, our Saviour assures us, that if any man be desirous to do his will, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether he spake of himself;" *i. e.* he shall be able to discern the doctrines which are from God.

This is the provision which God hath made for our security from fatal mistakes in religion; and this is, in all respects, a better security, and more likely to guide and conduct us safely to heaven, than any infallible church; and that for these reasons.

First, Because it is much more certain that God hath made this provision which I have mentioned, than that there is an infallible church appointed and assisted by him to this purpose. That the Scriptures are an infallible and adequate rule, and sufficiently plain in all things necessary, I have already proved; and I add further, that this was the constant judgment of the ancient church, and so declared by the unanimous consent of the fathers of it for many ages; and that all councils, in their determinations of faith, proceeded upon this rule, till the second council of Nice.

I have likewise proved, that God hath provided a succession of pastors and teachers in his church, to instruct us in this rule; and that we have God's infallible promise for our security from dangerous errors and mistakes, if, with an honest mind and due diligence, we apply ourselves to understand this rule, and make use of the means of instruction which God hath provided for that purpose.

But that there is an infallible church, appointed and assisted by God, to declare and determine matters of faith, and to be an infallible interpreter of Scripture, is not certain; because there is no clear and

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express text of Scripture to that purpose, that any church whatsoever, much less that the church of Rome, hath this power and privilege.

Nay, I add further, that it is impossible, according to the principles of the church of Rome, that this should be proved from Scripture; because, according to their principles, we cannot know either which are the true books of Scripture, or what is the true sense of Scripture, but from the authority and infallible declaration of that church. And if so, then the infallibility of the church must be first known and proved, before we can either know the Scriptures or the sense of them; and yet till we know the Scriptures, and the sense of them, nothing can be proved by them. Now, to pretend to prove the infallibility of their church by Scripture, and at the same time to declare, that which are the true books of Scripture, and what is the true sense of them, can only be proved by the infallible authority of their church, is a plain and shameful circle, out of which there is no way of escape; and, consequently, that God hath appointed an infallible church is impossible, according to their principles, ever to be proved from Scripture, and the thing is capable of no other proof. For that God will infallibly assist any society of men, is not to be known, but by Divine revelation. So that, unless they can prove it by some other revelation than that of Scripture (which they do not pretend to), the thing is not to be proved at all. Yes, they say, by the notes and marks of the true church; but what those marks are must either be known from Scripture, or some other Divine revelation, and then the same difficulty returns: besides that, one of the most essential marks of the true church must be the profession of the true faith;

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and then it must first be known which is the true faith, before we can know which is the true church; and yet they say, that no man can learn the true faith but from the true church; and this runs them unavoidably into another circle as shameful as the other. So that which way soever they go to prove an infallible church, they are shut up in a plain circle, and must either prove the Scriptures by the church, and the church by the Scriptures; or the true church by the true faith, and the true faith by the true church.

Secondly, This provision and security which I have mentioned is more human, better accommodated and suited to the nature of man; because it doth not suppose and need a standing and perpetual miracle, as the other way of an infallible church doth. All inspiration is supernatural and miraculous; and this infallible assistance which the church of Rome claims to herself, must either be such as the apostles had, which was by immediate inspiration, or something equal to it, and alike supernatural: but God does not work miracles without need, or continue them when there is no occasion for them. When God delivered the law to the people of Israel, it was accompanied with miracles, and the prophets, which he sent to them from time to time, had an immediate inspiration; but their supreme judicature, or their general council, which they call the Sanhedrin, was not infallibly assisted in the expounding of the law, when doubts and difficulties arose about it; no, nor in judging of true and false prophets; but they determined this, and all other emergent cases, by the standing revelation and rule of their written law; and that they were not infallibly assisted, is evident from the great errors they

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fell into, in "making void the commandments of God by their tradition," and in their rejecting and crucifying the true Messias and the Son of God.

In like manner the apostles and first teachers of the Christian religion were immediately inspired and assisted in the publishing of the Christian doctrine, and for the speedy and more effectual propagating and planting of it in the world, in despite of the violent prejudices that were against it, and the fierce opposition that was made to it. But when this was done, this miraculous and extraordinary assistance ceased, and God left the Christian religion to be preserved and continued by more human and ordinary ways; the doctrines of it being committed to writing, for a standing rule of faith and practice in all ages, and an order of men appointed to instruct people in those doctrines, with a promise to secure both teachers and people, that sincerely desire to know and do the will of God, from all fatal errors and mistakes about things necessary to their eternal salvation; and this is a provision more likely to be made by God, and better suited to the nature of man, than the perpetual and needless miracle of an inspired, or any otherwise infallible church.

Thirdly, This way is likewise more agreeable to the nature of religion and the virtue of faith. The design of an infallible church is to secure all that continue in the communion of it, against all possibility of error in matters of faith. The question now is not, whether an infallible church would do this? but whether that church which arrogates infallibility to itself does not pretend to do this? And if they could do it, it would not be agreeable to the nature of religion and the virtue of faith. For faith, which is

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the principle of all religious actions, would be no virtue, if it were necessary. A true and right belief can be no virtue, where a man is infallibly secured against error. There is the same reason of virtuous and criminal actions; and as there can be no crime or fault in doing what a man cannot help, so neither can there be any virtue. All virtuous actions are matter of praise and commendation; and therefore it can be no virtue in any man, because it deserves no commendation, to believe and own that the sun shines at noon-day when he sees it does so. No more would it be a virtue in any man, and deserve praise, to believe aright, who is in a church wherein he is infallibly secured against all errors in matters of faith. Make any thing necessary, and impossible to be otherwise, and the doing of it ceases to be a virtue. God hath so framed religion, that the evidence of truth, and the means of coming to the knowledge of it, as to be a sufficient security to men of honest minds and teachable tempers against all fatal and final mistakes concerning things necessary to salvation; but not so, that every man that is of such a church should be infallibly secured against all errors in matters of faith; and this on purpose to try the virtue and disposition of men, whether they will be at the pains to search for truth, and when it is proposed to them with sufficient evidence, though not by an infallible hand, they will receive it in the love of it, that they may be saved.

Fourthly, This is as much security against errors in matters of faith, as God hath provided against sin and vice in matters of practice; and, since a right belief is only in order to a good life, a man would be hard put to it, to give a wise reason why God

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should take greater care for the infallible security of men's faith than of their obedience. The reason pretended why God should make such infallible provision for a right faith, is, for the better security of men's eternal salvation and happiness. Now the virtues of a good life have a more direct and immediate influence upon that than the most orthodox belief. The end of the commandment (*i. e.* of the declaration of the gospel) is charity. In the Christian religion, that which mainly avails to our justification and salvation is, "a faith that worketh by charity," and the keeping of the commandments of God. "He that heareth these sayings of mine and doth them (saith our blessed Lord), I will liken him to a wise man that built his house upon a rock;" and again, "not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, (*i. e.* makes profession of faith in me) shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven;" and again, "if ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them." And the apostle St. Peter exhorts Christians to "add to their faith knowledge, and virtue, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity, that so an abundant entrance may be ministered to them, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." So that the virtues of a good life have the greatest influence upon our salvation, and the main stress of Christianity is to be laid there. And, therefore, whatever reason can be assigned why God should provide for the infallible security of our faith, is much stronger why an equal provision should be made to secure holiness and obedience of life; because, without this, faith cannot infallibly attain its end, which is the salvation of our souls. But this, it is granted, God hath

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not done, and experience shews it; and therefore it is unreasonable to suppose that he hath done the other. It is sufficient that, in both kinds, he hath done that which is sufficient to make us capable of happiness, if we be not wanting to ourselves; the rest he hath left to the sincerity of our endeavours; expecting we, on our part, "should work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure." And if God hath made such provision by the gospel for all that enjoy the light and advantage of it, that none can miscarry without their own fault, then both his goodness and wisdom are sufficiently acquitted, without an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith; and that irreverent way of arguing in the canon law might well have been spared—that of necessity there must be an infallible judge of controversies in religion; *aliter dominus non videretur fuisse discretus*, "otherwise God would not seem to have ordered matters discreetly."

But what infallible security soever they have, in the church of Rome, as to matters of faith, they are certainly the worst provided, of wholesome and safe directions for the consciences and lives of men, of any church in the world. No religion, that I know of in the world, ever had such lewd and scandalous casuists. Witness the moral divinity of the Jesuits, which hath been so exposed to the world, not only by those of our religion, but by their own writers also. Nor is this mischief only confined to that order; their casuists in general, and even the more ancient of them, who writ before the order of Jesuits appeared in the world, have given such a liberty and loose to great immorality in several kinds, as is infinitely to the reproach of the best and purest religion in the

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world. Insomuch that Sir Thomas More himself, who was a great zealot for that religion, could not forbear to make a loud complaint of it, and to pass this severe censure upon the generality of their casuists: "That their great business seemed to be, not to keep men from sin, but to teach them *quam prope ad peccatum liceat accedere sine peccato:* how near to sin they might lawfully come without sinning." In the mean time the consciences of men are not like to be well directed, when, instead of giving men plain rules for government of their hearts and lives, and clear resolutions of the material doubts which frequently occur in human life, they entangle them in niceties and endless scrupulosities, teaching them to split hairs in divinity, and how, with great art and cunning, they may avoid the committing of any sin, and yet come as near to it as possible. This is a thing of a most dangerous consequence to the souls of men; and if men be but once encouraged to pass to the utmost bounds of what is lawful, the next step will be into that which is unlawful.

So that unless faith without works will save men, notwithstanding the infallible security which they pretend to give men of a sound and right belief (if it were really as much as they talk of), the salvation of men would still be in great hazard and uncertainty, for want of better and safer directions for a good life, than are ordinarily to be met with in the casuistical writings of that church; especially if we consider that the Scriptures are locked up from the people in an unknown tongue, where the surest and plainest directions for a good life are most plentifully to be had; insomuch, that a man had better want all the volumes of casuistical divinity, that

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ever were written in the world, than to be without the Bible; by the diligent studying of which book alone, he may sooner learn the way to heaven than by all the books in the world without it.

Fifthly and lastly, This provision which God hath made, is, when all is done, as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one; and it is as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary that they should be prevented, and have an end put to them. And these are the two great reasons why an infallible judge is so importunately demanded and insisted upon. I shall speak to these distinctly and severally; but, because they will require a longer discourse than the time will allow, I shall not enter upon them at present, but refer them to another opportunity.

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SERMON LXXXVIII.

HONESTY THE BEST PRESERVATIVE AGAINST DANGEROUS MISTAKES IN RELIGION.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.—JOHN vii. 17.

WHEN I made entrance into these words, I proposed from this text:—

First, To shew that an honest and sincere mind, and a hearty desire and endeavour to do the will of God, is the greatest security and best preservative against dangerous errors and mistakes in matters of religion.

In the next place, I proceeded to remove an objection to which my discourse upon this subject might seem liable. Some, perhaps, might ask, Is every good man then secure from all error and mistake in matters of religion? This is a mighty privilege indeed. But do we not find the contrary in experience, that an honest heart and a weak head do often meet together? For answer to this, I laid down several propositions.

By the last of which I shewed, that God hath made abundant provision for our security from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, both by the infallible rule of the Holy Scripture, and by sufficient means of instruction to help us to understand this rule, and by his infallible promise of assisting us, if, with honest minds and a due diligence, we apply ourselves to the understanding of this rule, and

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the use of these means. And this, I told you, was in all respects a better security, and more likely to conduct us safe to heaven, than any infallible church whatsoever; and that for five reasons, four of which I have already treated of, and now proceed to the fifth, and last, viz.

Because this provision which I have shewn God hath made, is both as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one: and it is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them. And these are the two great reasons why an infallible judge is so importunately demanded and insisted upon. I shall speak to these two points distinctly and severally.

First, Because this is as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one. For an infallible church, if there were such an one upon earth, could not infallibly secure particular Christians against errors in faith any other way than by the definition and declaration of those who are infallible in that church. And there are but three that pretend to it: either the pope, or a general council, or the pope and a general council agreeing in the same definitions. Not the pope by himself, nor the general council without the pope; because the church, which pretends to infallibility, is not agreed that either of these alone is infallible, and therefore their definitions can be no certain, much less infallible, foundation of faith; no, not to that church which pretends to infallibility. So that, if there be an infallible oracle in that church, it must

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be the pope and council in conjunction, or the definition of a council confirmed by the pope. Now in that case, either the council was infallible in its definitions, before they had the pope's confirmation, or not. If the council was infallible in its definitions, before they had the pope's confirmation, then the council alone, and of itself, was infallible (which a great part of the church of Rome deny), and then it needed not the pope's confirmation to make it infallible: or else a general council is not infallible in its definitions before they receive the pope's confirmation, and then the pope's confirmation cannot make it so; for that, which was not infallibly defined by the council, cannot be made infallible by the pope's confirmation.

But there is another difficulty yet: it is a maxim generally received, and that even in the Roman church, "That the definitions of a general council, confirmed by the pope, are not obligatory, unless they be received by the universal church;" from whence these two great inconveniences will unavoidably follow:—

I. That no man is obliged to believe such definitions, till he certainly know that they are received by the universal church; which how he should certainly, much less infallibly, know, I cannot understand; unless he either speak with all the Christians in the world, or the representatives of all particular churches return back and meet again in council, to declare, that the universal church hath received their definitions; which, I think, was never yet done.

II. It will follow, that the definitions of a general council, confirmed by the pope, are not infallible till they be received by the universal church; for if they were infallible without that, they would be

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obligatory without it; because an infallible definition, if we know it to be so, lays an obligation to believe it, whether it be received by the universal church or not. And if such definitions are not infallible till they be received by the universal church, they cannot become infallible afterwards; because, if the definitions were not infallible before, they cannot be received as such by the universal church, nor, by the mere reception of them, be made to be infallible definitions, if they were not so before.

But if we should pass over all these difficulties, there is a greater yet behind, and that is, supposing the definitions of general councils confirmed by the pope to be infallible, particular Christians cannot be secured infallibly from error without the knowledge of those definitions. And there are but two ways imaginable of conveying this knowledge to them: either by the living voice of their particular pastors, whom they are implicitly to believe in these matters; but particular pastors are fallible (as they themselves grant), and therefore their words can neither be an infallible foundation of faith, nor an infallible means of conveying it; and it is unreasonable, they say, for men that own themselves to be fallible, to require an implicit belief to be given to them; or else the knowledge of the definitions of councils must be conveyed to particular Christians by writing; and if so, then there will only be an infallible rule, but no living infallible judge. And if an infallible rule will serve the turn, we have the Scriptures, which we are sure are infallible, and therefore at least as good as any other rule. But they say that the definitions of councils give us an infallible interpretation of Scripture, and therefore are of greater advantage to us. But do not the de-

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finitions of councils sometimes also need explication, that we may know the certain sense of them, without which we cannot know the doctrines defined? Yes, certainly, they need explication as much as Scripture, if there be any difference about the meaning of them; and there have been, and still are, great differences among those of their own church about the meaning of them. And if the explications of general councils need themselves to be explained, then there is nothing got by them, and we are but where we were before: for differences about the meaning of the definitions of general councils, make as great difficulties and uncertainties in faith as the differences about the meaning of Scripture:

Well, but the people have the living voice of their particular pastors to explain the definitions of councils to them. But this does not help the matter neither; for these two reasons.

1. Because particular pastors have no authority to explain the definitions of general councils. The council of Trent hath, by express decree, reserved to the pope, and to him only, the power to explain the definitions of the council, if any difference arise about the meaning of them. So that, if there be any difference about the true sense and meaning of any of the definitions of the council, particular pastors have no authority to explain them; and where there is no doubt or difference about the meaning of them, there is no occasion for the explication of them.

2. But suppose they had authority to explain them, this can be no infallible security to the people, that they explain them right; both because particular pastors are fallible; and likewise, because we see, in experience, that they differ in their explications; witness the bishop of Condom's exposition of the

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catholic faith, and of the definitions of the council of Trent, which is, in many material points, very different from that of Bellarmine, and many other famous doctors of that church. And, which is more, witness the many differences betwixt Ambrosius, Catharinus, and Dominicus à Soto, about the definitions of that council, in which they were both present and heard the debates, and themselves bore a great part in them. Now if they, who were present at the framing of the definitions of that council, cannot agree about the meaning of them, much less can it be expected from those that were absent.

Secondly, This provision which I have mentioned, is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them, as any infallible church would be, if there were one: and this is another reason why an infallible church is so much insisted upon, that there may be some way and means for a final decision of controversies, which the Scriptures cannot be, because they are only a dead rule, which can end no controversy without a living judge ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occasions.

It is not necessary that all controversies in religion should either be prevented or decided: this the church, which pretends to be infallible, cannot pretend to have done; because there are manifold controversies, even in the church of Rome herself, concerning matters of religion, which still remain undecided; and, in their commentaries upon Scripture, many differences about the sense of several texts concerning which she hath not thought fit to give an infallible interpretation. And where their popes, and several of their general councils, have thought

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fit to meddle with Scripture, they have applied and interpreted texts more improperly and absurdly than even their private doctors. And which is more, in differences about points of faith, which are pretended on both sides to be fundamental, this church hath not thought fit to put an end to them by her infallible decision, after two hundred years brangling about them. For instance, in that fierce and long difference about the immaculate conception of the blessed Virgin, which, on both sides, is pretended to be an article of faith, and for which contrary revelations of their canonized saints are so frequently pretended; and yet neither pope, nor general council, have thought fit to exert their infallibility for the decision of this controversy. So that if their church had this talent of infallibility ever committed to them, they have with the slothful servant laid it up in a napkin; and, according to our Saviour's rule, have long since forfeited it, for not making use of it.

And whereas it is pretended that the Scripture is but a dead rule, which can end no controversies without a living judge ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occasions; the same objection lies against them, unless a general council, which is their living judge, were always sitting. For the definitions of their councils in writing are liable to the same and greater objections, than the written rule of the Scriptures.

The sum of all is this. In differences about lesser matters, mutual charity and forbearance will secure the peace of the church, though the differences remain undecided; and in greater matters, an infallible rule searched into with an honest mind and due diligence, and with the help of good instruction, is more

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likely to extinguish and put an end to such differences than any infallible judge, if there were one; because a humble and honest mind is more likely to yield to reason, than a perverse and cavilling temper is to submit to the sentence of an infallible judge, unless it were backed with an inquisition. The church of Rome supposeth herself infallible, and yet, notwithstanding that, she finds that some question and deny her infallibility, and then her sentence signifies nothing. And of those who own it, many dispute the sense and meaning of her sentence; and whether they deny the infallibility of her sentence, or dispute the sense of it, in neither of these cases will it prove effectual to the deciding of any difference.

But after all this provision which we pretend God hath made for honest and sincere minds, do we not see that men fall into dangerous and damnable errors, who yet cannot, without great uncharitableness, be supposed not to be sincerely desirous to know the truth, and to do the will of God?

To this I shall briefly return these two things.

I. That the same errors are not equally damnable to all. The innocent and (humanly speaking) almost invincible prejudices of education in some persons even against a fundamental truth; the different capacities of men, and the different means of conviction afforded to them; the greater and lesser degrees of obstinacy, and a faulty will in opposing the truths proposed to them; all these, and perhaps several other considerations besides, may make a great difference in the guilt of men's errors, and the danger of them.

II. When all is done the matter must be left to God, who only knoweth the hearts of all the children

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of men. We cannot see into the hearts of men, nor know all their circumstances, and how they may have provoked God to forsake them, and give them up to error and delusion, "because they would not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be saved." And as, on the one hand, God will consider all men's circumstances, and the disadvantages they were under for coming to the knowledge of the truth, and make allowance to men for their invincible errors, and forgive them upon a general repentance: so, on the other hand, he who sees the insincerity of men, and that the errors of their understandings did proceed from gross faults of their lives, will deal with them accordingly. But if men be honest and sincere, God, who hath said "if any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine," will certainly be as good as his word.

It now remains only to draw some inferences from this discourse, and they shall be these three:

First, From this text, and what hath been discoursed upon it, we may infer how slender and ill-grounded the pretence of the church of Rome to infallibility is; whether they place it in the pope, or in a general council, or in both. The last is the most general opinion; and yet it is hard to understand how infallibility can result from the pope's confirmation of a general council, when neither the council was infallible in framing its definitions, nor the pope in confirming them. If the council were infallible in framing them, then they needed no confirmation: if they were not, then infallibility is only in the pope that confirms them, and then it is the pope only that is infallible. But no man that reads these words of our Saviour, "if any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine," would ever

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imagine that the bishop of Rome (whoever he shall happen to be) was secured from all fatal errors in matters of faith, much less that he were endowed with an infallible spirit, in judging what doctrines are from God, and what not. For it cannot be denied, but that many of their popes have been notoriously wicked and vicious in their lives: nay, Bellarmine himself acknowledgeth, that, for a succession of fifty popes together, there was not one pious and virtuous man that sat in that chair; and some of their popes have been condemned and deposed for heresy; and yet, for all this, the pope, and the governing part of that church, would bear the world in hand that he is infallible. But if this saying of our Saviour be true, that "if any man will do his will, he shall know of his doctrine, whether it be of God;" then every honest man, that sincerely desires to do the will of God, hath a fairer pretence to infallibility, and a clearer text for it, than is to be found in the whole Bible for the infallibility of the bishop of Rome. What would the church of Rome give, that there were but as express a text in Scripture for the infallibility of their popes, as this is for the security of every good man in his judgment of doctrines; which makes infallibility needless? What an insufferable noise, and what endless triumphs would they make upon it, if it had been any where said in the Bible, that if any man be bishop of Rome, and sit in St. Peter's chair, he shall know of my doctrine whether it be of God? Had there been such a text as this, we should never have been troubled with their impertinent citation of texts, and their remote and blind inferences, from *Pasce Oves*, and *super hanc petram*; "Feed my sheep;" "and upon this rock will I build my church;" to prove the pope's

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infallibility. And yet no man of sense or reason ever extended the text I am speaking to, so far as to attempt to prove from it the infallibility of every good man, but only his security from fatal errors and mistakes in religion. The largest promises that are made in Scripture of security from error and mistake about Divine things, are made to good men, who sincerely desire to do the will of God. And if this be so, we must conclude several popes to have been the farthest from infallibility of any men in the world. And, indeed, there is not a more compendious way to persuade men that the Christian religion is a fable, than to set up a lewd and vicious man for the oracle of it.

Nay, I will go farther yet; that there are no other promises made in Scripture of direction or assistance, or security from mistake, to any church; but the same are made in as full and express terms to every good man that sincerely desires to know the truth, and to practise it. Is it promised to the church, or to the pastors of it, "I will be with you always?" And hath not our Saviour promised the same to every one that is obedient to his word? (John xiv. 23.) "If any man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him?" And does not the apostle apply the same promise to every good Christian: (Heb. xiii. 5.) "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" For where is the difference between these expressions, "I will be with you," and "I will make my abode with him;" "I will be with you always," and "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" Is it not promised to the church, that "the Spirit shall lead her into all truth?" And is not the same promise made to

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every good man? (John xiv. 21.) "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and I will manifest myself to him;" that is, God will reveal his will to those that love him, and keep his commandments. Hath God promised to build his church upon a rock? And doth not our Saviour use the same metaphor concerning every man that doth the will of God? (Matth. vii. 24.) "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them, is like a wise man that built his house upon a rock." So that if to be built upon a rock signifies infallibility, it belongs to every good man who sincerely practiseth what he knows, as much as to any church.

When men are enabled by God to work miracles for the confirmation of the doctrines which they deliver, there is great reason to believe that they are infallibly assisted in the delivery of those doctrines; but without this, it is the vainest thing in the world for any person or church to pretend to it, because they offer no evidence fit to satisfy any man that they are so assisted: and I do not hear that the pope, among all his privileges, does pretend to the power of miracles.

Secondly, From hence, likewise, we may infer the great reason of error and infidelity in the world. If any man be an infidel, it is not the fault of his understanding, but of his will; it is not because there is not sufficient evidence that the Christian religion is from God, but because men's interests and lusts make them partial and incompetent judges of matters of religion. The evidence of the Christian religion is such as recommends it to every man's reason and conscience; so that (as St. Paul argues)

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" If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.)

If men did but stand indifferent for the entertainment of truth, and were not swayed by the interest of any lust or passion, I am confident that no man that hath the gospel fairly proposed to him would continue an infidel. If men did but truly live up to the principles of natural religion, they would easily be convinced that the Christian religion, which is so suitable thereto, is from God.

Thirdly and lastly, What hath been said is a great argument and encouragement to obedience and holiness of life. Do we desire not to be mistaken about the mind of God? let us heartily endeavour to do his will. If we would not be seduced by the error of the wicked, let us take heed of their vicious practices. The best way certainly to preserve a right judgment in matters of religion, is to take great care of a good life. God's goodness is such, that he will not suffer any man's judgment to be betrayed into a damnable error, without some vice and fault of his will. The principles of natural religion are born with us, and imprinted upon our minds, so that no man can be ignorant of them, nor need to be mistaken about them; and as for those revelations which God hath made of himself to the world, he hath been pleased to accompany them with so much evidence, that an honest and sincere mind may easily discern them from error and imposture. So our Saviour hath assured us, that if any man desire to do his will, " he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

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On the other hand, if we see any oppose the clear truth, or depart from it, and embrace gross errors and delusions, we may almost certainly conclude that there is some worldly interest or lust at the bottom of it. So our Saviour has likewise told us, that the reason why "men love darkness rather than light," is, "because their deeds are evil; and every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." I will conclude this whole discourse with St. Peter's exhortation, the 2d of Pet. iii. 17, 18. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory, both now and for ever. Amen."

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SERMON LXXXIX.

THE NATURE OF COVETOUSNESS.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.—LUKE xii. 15.

AMONG all the irregular appetites of men, there is none that is more common and unreasonable, and of a more universal bad influence upon the hearts and lives of men, than this of covetousness; and therefore, in speaking of this vice, I shall strike at the root of a great many others; even of apostacy from God's truth and religion, of which covetousness, and the love of this present world, is one of the most common causes. So that if I can contribute any thing to the cure of this great distemper of men's minds, I shall, in so doing, remove that which is the cause and occasion of a great part of the evils and mischiefs which are in the world. And to this end I have pitched upon these words of our blessed Saviour to his hearers: "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

In which words are these three things observable:

First, The manner of the caution which our Saviour here gives, "Take heed and beware;" he doubles it, to shew the great need and concernment of it.

Secondly, The matter of the caution, or the vice which our Saviour here warns his hearers against,

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and that is covetousness: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness."

Thirdly, The reason of this caution, "because a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Human life is sustained by a little, and therefore abundance is not necessary either to the support or comfort of it. It is not a great estate and vast possessions that make a man happy in this world; but a mind that is equal to its condition, whatever it be.

First, The manner of the caution which our Saviour here gives, "Take heed and beware." This is a peculiar kind of caution, and no where else, or upon any other occasion that I know of, used in Scripture; in which, for the greater emphasis and weight, the words of caution are doubled, as if the matter were of so much concernment, that no caution about it could be too much, to signify to us both the great danger of this sin of covetousness, and the great care men ought to use to preserve themselves from it.

I. The great danger of this sin; how apt we are to fall into this vice, and of how pernicious a consequence it is to those in whom it reigns.

1. How apt are we to fall into this vice: and, excepting those vices which are immediately founded in a man's natural temper and constitution, there is none that men have a more universal propension to than this of covetousness. For there are two things which human nature does more especially desire to be secured against, which are want and contempt: and riches seem to be a certain remedy against both these evils. And because men think they can never be sufficiently secured against these, therefore their desire of riches grows endless and insatiable; so

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that, unless men be very jealous and watchful over themselves, this desire will grow upon them, and enlarge itself beyond all bounds.

2. As men are very apt to fall into this vice, so is it of very pernicious consequence to those in whom it reigns. The mischief of it is very great and very extensive: so Paul tells us, (1 Tim. vi. 8, 9, 10.) where he presseth men to be contented with a small competency of the things of this life, because of the great danger and mischief of a covetous mind; "having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich (that is, they that are bent and resolved upon being rich) fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil." But this I shall speak more fully to, when I come to shew the great evil and unreasonableness of this vice.

II. This earnest kind of caution, as it signifies the great danger of this sin of covetousness, so likewise the great care that men ought to use to preserve themselves from it; for the greater the danger is in any kind, so much the greater care should be used for the avoiding of it. Men are not so solicitously concerned to defend themselves against a slight mischief; but when a terrible one threatens us, we should be continually upon our guard against it, and summon all our strength and force to resist it. Thus much for the manner of the caution.

I proceed to the second thing to be considered in the text; viz. the matter of the caution, or the vice which our Saviour here warns his hearers against, and that is covetousness; "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." And in speaking of this, I shall consider these two things:

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I. Wherein the nature of this vice consists.

II. I shall endeavour to shew the great evil and unreasonableness of it. I shall be large in both.

I. For the nature of this vice of covetousness. The shortest description that I can give of it is this: that it is an inordinate desire and love of riches; but when this desire and love are inordinate, is not so easy to be determined. And therefore, that we may the better understand what the sin of covetousness is, which our Saviour doth so earnestly caution against, it will be requisite to consider more particularly wherein the vice and fault of it doth consist; that, whilst we are speaking against covetousness, we may not under that general word condemn any thing that is commendable or lawful. To the end, then, that we may the more clearly and distinctly understand wherein the nature of this vice doth consist, I shall

First, Endeavour to shew what is not condemned under this name of covetousness, either in Scripture or according to right reason: and,

Secondly, What is condemned by either of these, as a plain instance or branch of this sin.

First, What things are not condemned under the name of covetousness, either in Scripture or according to right reason, which yet have some appearance of it; namely, these three things:

1. Not a provident care about the things of this present life.

2. Not a regular industry and diligence for the obtaining of them: nor,

3. Every degree of love and affection to them. I mention these three, because they may all seem to be condemned by Scripture, as parts or degrees of this vice, but really are not.

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1. Not a provident care about the things of this present life. This, indeed, seems to be condemned in Scripture as a branch of covetousness; namely, in our Saviour's sermon upon the mount, (Matth. vi. 25.) "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." Here our Saviour seems to forbid all care, even about the necessaries of life, meat, and drink, and clothing, much more about the delights and conveniences of it. But this is not absolutely, and in ordinary cases, intended by our Saviour to be condemned, as I shall shew by and by under the next head.

2. Neither is a regular industry and diligence for the obtaining of these things condemned in Scripture; though this also seems to be prohibited by our Saviour, in the same chapter, (ver. 26.) "Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them;" and, (ver. 28.) "Why take ye thought for raiment? consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin." In which words our Saviour seems to intimate, that we ought to depend upon the providence of God for food and raiment, and to use no more industry for the obtaining of them than the fowls of the air do, or the lilies of the field: and the same may seem to be collected out of this chapter of St. Luke; for after our Saviour had in my text cautioned them against covetousness, and spoken to them a parable to that purpose, of "a rich man who enlarged his barns, and laid up goods for many years," he infers from thence, (ver. 22.) that men should take no thought for the things of this life, nor use any industry about them: "And he said unto his disciples, There-

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fore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on."

Now, to avoid all inconvenience from our Saviour's words, I think that it is commonly said by interpreters, that he does here only condemn a distrustful and anxious care about the things of this life, and an over-solicitous industry and diligence for the obtaining of them; but that he allows a prudent care and regular industry about these things: and this were very well said, if it would agree with the scope and design of our Saviour's discourse; but the instances which he gives of the fowls of the air, and the lilies of the field, which are sufficiently provided for without any care and industry of theirs, and which he seems to set before us for a pattern; "Behold (says he) the fowls of the air:" I say, these instances which he gives, seem to exclude even all regular and ordinary care and diligence about these things.

What shall we say then, that our Saviour intended by his religion to take men off from all labour and industry in their callings? This seems to be unreasonable; and indeed so it certainly were, if our Saviour had given this for a standing and ordinary rule to all Christians; and not only so, but contrary to the apostle's doctrine, who constantly charged Christians to labour with great diligence in their callings, that they might be able to provide for themselves and their families.

But this discourse of our Saviour's was not intended for a general and standing rule to all Christians; but only designed for his disciples, to take them off from all care about the things of this life, that they might attend upon his person, and wholly

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give up themselves to that work to which he had called them. And therefore St. Luke takes notice, that, after he had cautioned his hearers in general against covetousness, he applies himself particularly to his disciples, and tells them, that he would have them so far from this vice of covetousness, that they should not so much as use that ordinary care and industry about the things of this life, which is not only lawful, but necessary for men in all ordinary cases, (ver. 22.) "And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat." And this agrees very well with the direction which our Saviour gave to his disciples, when he first sent them forth to preach: (Matth. x. 9.) "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses, neither coat nor scrip;" which no man ever understood as a general law to all Christians, but as a particular precept to the apostles at that time.

And, if this be our Saviour's meaning, there is then no reason to think that this caution against covetousness does forbid men to use a provident care and regular industry about the things of this life.

3. Nor is every degree of love and affection to the things of this world condemned in Scripture, as any branch or part of this vice of covetousness; but such a love of the things of this world as is truly consistent with the love of God, and a due and a serious care of our souls, is allowed both by Scripture and reason. St. John indeed seems to condemn all love of the world, and of the things of it, as utterly inconsistent with the love of God: (1 John ii. 15.) "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him:" but this is,

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according to the Hebrew phrase and manner of speaking, to forbid things absolutely, which are to be understood only comparatively. So Matth. vi. 19. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven;" *i. e.* be not so solicitous for the good things of this world, as for the glory and happiness of the next. And, (Luke xii. 4.) "Be not afraid of them that kill the body;" that is, fear them not so much as "him that can destroy both body and soul in hell:" and, (Luke xiv. 26.) "If any man come unto me, and hate not his father and mother, and all that he hath;" that is, if he do not love me more than all these things, "he cannot be my disciple:" and, (John vi. 27.) "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life;" that is, labour not so much for the one as for the other—be not so solicitous about the things of this life as about the great concernments of eternity. So likewise (Coloss. iii. 2.) "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth;" *i. e.* set them more on things above, than on earthly things. So here, "Love not the world, neither the things of the world;" that is, do not overvalue them, do not love them so much as not to be able to part with them for Christ; for if any man thus love the world, he does not love God as he ought. So that when the Scripture commands us not to love the world, this is to be understood comparatively, that we should not love these things in comparison of God, and the great concernments of another world: but it does not forbid us to love these things in a due degree, and with a due subordination to those things which are more excellent, and of infinitely greater concernment to us. For nothing can be more incon-

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sistent than to recommend to men diligence in their worldly callings and employments (as the Scripture frequently does), and that in order to the attaining of the good things of this life; and yet to forbid us to love these things at all. For if men have no degree of love to them, the best argument to diligence for the obtaining of them would be taken away. Besides that, we are commanded in Scripture to be thankful to God for bestowing on us the blessings of this life, and we are to love him upon this account. Now can any man love the giver for bestowing such gifts upon him, which, if he does as he ought, he must not love?

You see then what those are which the Scripture does not condemn as any branch or degree of this vice of covetousness; a provident care and a regular industry, and such a degree of love to the things of this world, as is consistent with the love of God and the care of our soul.

Secondly, I come now to shew what is condemned in Scripture under the name of covetousness; and by this we shall best understand wherein the nature of this sin doth consist. Now covetousness is a word of a large signification, and comprehends in it most of the irregularities of men's minds, either in desiring, or getting, or in possessing, and using an estate. I shall speak to each of these severally.

I. Covetousness, in the desire of riches, consists in an eager and insatiable desire after the things of this world. This the Scripture condemns, though it be free from injustice, as it seldom happens to be. This insatiable desire of wealth, God plainly condemns by his prophet: (Isa. v. 8.) "Woe unto them that join house to house, and lay field to field, till

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there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth." And this is that which our Saviour here in the text seems to have a more particular respect to, when he cautions men against the sin of covetousness, as appears both from the reason which he gives of this caution, and from the parable whereby he illustrates it. From the reason which he gives of this caution, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for the life of man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." As if he had said, Take great care to set some bounds to your desires after the things of this world. For whatever men may imagine, it is certain, in experience, that it is not the abundance of outward things which makes the life of man happy. Wealth and content do not always dwell together; nay, so far from that, that perhaps they very seldom meet.

And the parable likewise which follows upon this caution, doth sufficiently shew this to be our Saviour's meaning; for he illustrates what he was speaking of, by a rich man whose desire of wealth was never satisfied, but he was continually increasing his estate and enlarging his barns, to make more room still for his fruits, that he might "lay up goods in store for many years." The parable does not so much as intimate any indirect and unjust ways of gain which this man used to increase his estate, but condemns his insatiable desire and thirst after more; so that even this alone is covetousness, and a great fault, though it were attended with no other; because it is unreasonable and without end.

II. There is covetousness likewise in getting an estate; and the vice or evil of this kind of covetousness consists chiefly in these three things.

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1. In the use of unlawful and unjust ways to get or increase an estate. He is a covetous man, who, by the greediness of gain, is tempted to do any unjust action, whether it be in the way of fraud and deceit, or of violence and oppression. And this, perhaps, is that which is most frequently in Scripture called covetousness. And this I take to be the meaning of the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet;" wherein is forbidden all unjust desire of that which is another man's, and all unjust endeavours and attempts to deprive him of it. For so our Saviour renders it, Mark x. 19. where he says to the young man that came to be directed by him, what good thing he should do, that he might inherit eternal life—"Thou knowest the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness;" and then, instead of the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," or rather by way of explication of it, he adds, μὴ ἀποστερήσῃς, *defraud not;* as if he had said in a word, Be not injurious to thy neighbour in any kind, in desiring or endeavouring to deprive him of any thing that is his. As the Romans in their laws were wont to comprehend those crimes, which had no proper name, by the general name of *stellionatus* and *dolus malus;* so here in the decalogue, after God had instanced in the chief and most common sorts of injuries which men are guilty of towards their neighbour, as murder, adultery, theft, bearing of false witness; he sums up all the rest, which could not so easily be reckoned particularly, in this short and general prohibition, "Thou shalt not covet;" that is, thou shalt not be injurious to thy neighbour in any kind; in his wife, or servant, or house, or cattle, "or any thing that is his." Covetousness, or any inordinate

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desire of that which is our neighbour's, being commonly the root and parent of all those kind of injuries.

And for the same reason St. Matthew, instead of the tenth commandment, puts this general precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," as being the sense of it in other words: (Matt. xix. 18, 19.) "Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And this command of loving our neighbour as ourselves, our Saviour elsewhere tells us, was the sum of the duties of the second table; and it is the same in sense with that precept of our Saviour, (Matt. vii. 12.) "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." That is, as thou wouldest have no man to be injurious to thee in any thing, so be not thou to any other man in any kind. And the apostle (Rom. xiii. 8, 9, 10.) shews us upon what account this general precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is the sum of the second table. "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law; for this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And then headds, in the next words, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." That is, he that truly loves his neighbour will not be injurious to him in any kind: therefore love is the sum of the law.

The design of all this is to shew, that he that is

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injurious to his neighbour in his estate in any kind is properly guilty of the sin of covetousness, which is forbidden in the tenth commandment. So that all arts of fraud and oppression, whereby men endeavour to get and increase an estate by the injury of their neighbour, is a branch of the sin of covetousness.

2. The vice of covetousness in getting wealth, does likewise consist in an anxious and tormenting care about obtaining the things of this life. The regular and due temper of a man's mind about the things of this world, is to commit ourselves to the providence of God in the use of honest and lawful endeavours, and to refer the success of all to his good pleasure; and whatsoever is beyond this, is a branch from the evil root of covetousness. We distrust the providence of God, when, after we had used our best endeavours, and begged his blessing upon them, we torment ourselves about the issue and event of things. And as this is sinful, so it is vain and to no purpose. Diligence in our business is the way to get an estate; but no man was ever the richer for tormenting himself because he is not so. The reason why men seek the things of this world, and take pains to get them, is to make life convenient and comfortable; and consequently, he that torments himself about the getting of these things contradicts himself, in his own design, because he makes his life miserable, that he may make it comfortable.

3. The sin of covetousness in getting, consists in seeking the things of this life, with the neglect of things infinitely better, and which are of far greater and nearer concernment to us. He is a covetous man, who so minds the world, as to neglect God

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and his soul; who is so busy and intent upon making provision for this life, as to take no care of the other; so concerned for a few days of his pilgrimage here, as to have no consideration and regard for his eternal abode in another world. God allows us to provide for this life, and considers the necessities which do continually press us while we are in the body: but while we are making provision for these dying bodies, he expects that we should remember that we have immortal souls: which, since they are to have an endless duration in another world, ought to be provided for with far greater care. It is an inordinate desire of riches, when men so lay out all their care and industry for the obtaining of them, as if nothing else were to be regarded, as if no consideration at all were to be had of another world, and of that better part of ourselves which is to continue and live for ever. All desires and endeavours after riches, which take men off from the business of religion and the care of their souls, which allow men neither the leisure and opportunity, nor the heart and affection to love God and to serve him, are to be referred to the sin of covetousness, which is here condemned by our Saviour in the text.

III. There is covetousness likewise in possessing or using an estate; and this consists chiefly in these three things:

First, When men are sordid towards themselves, and cannot find in their hearts to use and enjoy what they possess; are continually adding to their estate, without any design of enjoyment; and take infinite pains to raise a huge fortune, not that they may use it, but that they may be said to have it. This is a degree of covetousness even beyond that of the rich man in the parable after the text: for he,

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it seems, after he had enlarged his barns to his mind, and laid up goods for many years, designed at last to have taken his ease, and have fallen to the enjoyment of what he had gotten; "to have eat and drank, and to have been merry;" and this, though it proved but a foolish design in the issue, he being cut off in that very instant when he was come to the point of satisfaction and enjoyment; yet it is infinitely more reasonable, than to take great pains to get an estate with a full resolution never to be the better for it.

Secondly, Men are covetous in keeping an estate, when they do not use it charitably; when they cannot find in their hearts to spare any thing out of their abundance to the relief of those who are in want. Though a man get an estate without covetousness, and have a heart to enjoy it, yet so far he is covetous, as he is uncharitable. He loves money more than he ought, who, having enough to spare, chooseth rather to keep it than to do good with it, and to use it to one of the principal ends for which God gives an estate.

Thirdly, They likewise are covetous who place their chief trust and happiness in riches, who (as the expression is, Job. xxxi. 24.) "make gold their hope, and say to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence." And this is the reason why covetousness is so often in Scripture called idolatry; because the covetous man sets up his riches in the place of God, putting his trust and confidence in them, and setting his whole heart upon them, loving them as he should love God only, with all his heart, and soul, and strength: and therefore mammon, which signifies riches, is in Scripture represented as a deity, and the covetous man, as a servant or worshipper of mammon.

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So that in Scripture he is a covetous man who placeth his chief felicity in a great fortune, and would venture to lose any thing rather than to part with that; who will quit his religion, and violate his conscience and run the hazard of his soul, rather than forfeit his estate, or the hopes of advancing it to his mind.

And this, in times of trial and difficulty, is the great temptation to which the covetous man is exposed. When a man may not only save himself, but get considerable advantage by departing from the truth; and in changing his religion, may have a good sum of money to boot, or, which is equal to it, a good place; this to a covetous mind is a very strong temptation, and almost irresistible. When error and delusion can bid so high, and offer so good terms, no wonder if it gain some proselytes among the covetous and ambitious part of mankind. This the apostle gives warning of, as a great temptation to rich men in times of suffering: (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.) "They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare: for the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have lusted after, they have erred from the faith." The young man in the gospel is a sad instance of this kind, who chose rather to leave Christ than to part with his great possessions. And such an one was Demas, who forsook the apostles, and Christianity itself, to cleave to this present world.

Thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to speak to, the nature of this vice, which our Saviour in the text cautions men so earnestly against; "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." I shall now proceed, in the second place, to shew the evil and unreasonableness of this vice: but that shall be the subject of another discourse.

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SERMON XC.

THE EVIL AND UNREASONABLENESS OF COVETOUSNESS.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.—LUKE xii. 15.

I HAVE made entrance into a discourse upon these words, in which I told you there are three things observable.

First, The manner of the caution which our Saviour here gives, "Take heed and beware."

Secondly, The matter of the caution, or the sin which our Saviour here warns his hearers against, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness:" and,

Thirdly, The reason of this caution, because "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

In discoursing of the second of these, viz. the matter of the caution, I proposed,

1. To consider wherein the nature of this vice of covetousness does consist.

2. To shew the evil and unreasonableness of it.

The first of these I have dispatched, and now go on to the second; viz. To shew the great evil and unreasonableness of the vice of covetousness.

Now covetousness will appear to be very evil and unreasonable upon these following accounts.

I. Because it takes men off from religion and the care of their souls.

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II. Because it tempts men to do many things which are inconsistent with religion and directly contrary to it.

III. Because it is an endless and insatiable desire.

IV. Because the happiness of human life doth not consist in riches.

V. Because riches do very often contribute very much to the misery and infelicity of men.

First, Covetousness takes men off from religion and the care of their souls. The covetous man is wholly intent upon this world; and his inordinate desire after these things, makes him to neglect God and the eternal concernments of his soul. He employs all his time, and care, and thoughts about these temporal things; and his vehement love and eager pursuit of these things steals away his heart from God, robs him of his time, and of all opportunities for his soul, and diverts him from all serious thoughts of another world and the life to come. And the reason of this is that which our Saviour gives: (Matt. vi. 24.) "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." No man can serve two masters so different as God and the world are; because they will give cross commands, and enjoin contrary things. God calls upon us to mind the duties of his worship and service, to have a serious regard to religion, and a diligent care of our souls: but the cares of the world, and the importunity of business, and an eager appetite of being rich, call us off from these Divine and spiritual employments, or disturb us in them. God calls upon us to be charitable to those that are in want, to be willing to distribute, and

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ready to communicate to the necessities of our brethren: but our covetousness pulls us back, and hales us another way, and checks all merciful and charitable inclinations in us. God calls us to self-denial, and suffering, for the sake of him and his truth, and commands us to prefer the keeping of faith and a good conscience to all worldly considerations whatsoever: but the world inspires us with other thoughts, and whispers to us "to save ourselves, not to be righteous over much;" and rather to trust God with our souls, than men with our bodies and estates.

If we set our hearts and affections strongly upon any thing, they will partake of the object which they are conversant about; for where our treasure is (as our Lord hath told us) there will our hearts be also. If a great estate be our chief end and design, if riches be our treasure and our happiness, our hearts will be found among the stuff. We cannot bestow our affections freely upon two objects. We cannot intensely love God and the world; for no man can have two ultimate ends, two principal designs. Our riches may increase; but if we set our hearts upon them, and give them the chief place in our affections, we may make them our lord and master. Whatever we make our ultimate end, we give it a sovereignty and empire over us; we put ourselves under its dominion, and make ourselves subject to all its commands. So that if it "bid us go, we must go; come, we must come; do this, we must do it; because we are under authority:" the world is our master, and we are its slaves. Now he that is under the rule and dominion of this master, must withdraw his obedience from God, and, in many cases, decline obedience to his laws.

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This worldly covetous disposition was that which made those in the parable to make so many excuses, when they were invited to the supper: (Luke xiv. 18.) "One had bought a farm, and he could not come: another had bought so many yoke of oxen, and therefore he desired to be excused." Riches do so fill the covetous man's heart, and the cares of the world so possess his mind, that he hath no room left in his soul for any other guests: *Intus existens prohibet alienum*, "that which is full already can receive no more." The covetous man's heart is taken up with such things as keep out God, and Christ, and better things. "If any man love the world, and the things of it," to this degree, St. John tells us, that "the love of the Father is not in him." In the parable of the sower, (Matth. xiii. 7.) our Saviour represents to us, the cares of the world, which choke the word of God, by thorns which sprung up among the seed, and stifled the growth of it. The cares of the world will not suffer the word of God to take deep root in our hearts, and to have any permanent effect upon them: and, (Ezek. xxxiii. 31.) God gives this as a reason why the people of Israel would not hearken to the words of his prophet—because their hearts were upon the world. "They come unto thee (says God there to the prophet) as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their hearts goeth after their covetousness." A heart that is deeply engaged in the world, will stand out against all the invitations, and promises, and threatenings of God's word. When the word of God invites such persons, it is like making love to those who have already fixed their

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hearts and affections elsewhere; the promises and threatenings of the gospel signify but very little to such men, because their hearts are set upon worldly things, and all their affections are bent that way; all their hopes and desires are worldly; to be rich and abound in wealth; and all their fears are of poverty and loss. Now such a man can only be moved with the promises and threatenings of temporal things; for no promises have any effect upon us, but such as are of some good which we care for and value: nor are any threatenings apt to move us, but such as are of some evil which we dread and are afraid of. And therefore, when eternal life, and the happiness of another world, are offered to a worldly-minded man, he does not desire it, he is not at all sensible of the value of it; the man's heart is full already of other hopes and desires, and "the full soul loatheth the honeycomb." Promise to such a man the kingdom of heaven, and the pleasures of God's presence, and the joys of eternity, this does not signify to such a man any good or happiness that he is sensible of, or knows how to relish. And, on the other hand, threaten him with the loss of God, and an eternal separation from that fountain of happiness, and with the unspeakable anguish and torments of a long eternity; these things, though they be terrible, yet they are at a distance, and the covetous man is inured to sense, and is only to be moved with things present and sensible; he cannot extend his fears so far as another world, so long as he finds himself well and at ease as to the things of this present life.

If we would affect such a man, we must offer to his consideration something that is fit to work upon him; threaten him with breaking open his house,

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and rifling his coffers, and carrying away his full bags; with questioning his title to his estate, or starting a precedent mortgage, or something of the like nature: these things indeed are dreadful and terrible to him; now you speak intelligibly to him, and he understands what you mean: tell him of a good bargain, or an advantageous purchase, offer him decently a good bribe, or give him notice of a young heir that may be circumvented and drawn in, then you say something to him that is worthy of his regard and attention; the man may be tempted by such offers and promises as these: but discourse to him with the tongue of men and angels, of the excellency of virtue and goodness, and of the necessity of it, to the obtaining of a glory and happiness that shall never have bounds nor end; and "Lo! thou art unto him as a lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument; for he hears thy words, but he will not do them;" as the prophet expresseth it, (Ezek. xxxiii. 32.) Such discourses as these they look upon as fine talk, or a melodious sound, that vanisheth into air, but leaves no impression behind it. Perhaps even these dull and stupid kind of men are affected a little for the present with the liveliness of the romance, and the poetical vein of the preacher; but these things pass away like a tale that is told, but have no lasting effect upon them. So effectually doth covetousness and the love of this present world obstruct all those passages, through which the consideration of religion and heavenly things should enter into our minds.

Secondly, As covetousness hinders men from religion, and takes them off from a due care of their souls; so it many times tempts and engageth men

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to do many things contrary to religion, and inconsistent with it: it is the natural source and fountain of a great many evils, and the parent of most of the worst of vices. He that will engage deep in the world, must use much more guard and caution than most men do, to do it without sin. How many temptations is the covetous man exposed to in the getting, and in the securing, and in the spending, and enjoying of a great estate? It is no easy task to reckon them up, and much more difficult to escape or resist them, and yet each of these temptations brings him into the dangers of a great many sins. For,

I. In the getting of an estate he is exposed to all those vices which may seem to be serviceable to this design. Nothing has been the cause of more and greater sins in the world than covetousness, and making haste to be rich. It is Solomon's observation, (Prov. xxviii. 20.) "He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent." He does not say he cannot be innocent, but he speaks as if there were all the probability in the world that he will not prove to be so; but, being in so much haste, will almost unavoidably fall into a great many oversights and faults. And the heathen poet makes the same observation in more words:

Inde fere scelerum causæ, nec plura venena
Miscuit, aut ferro grassatur sæpius ullum
Humanæ mentis vitium, quam sæva cupido
Immodici Census: nam dives qui fieri vult,
Et cito vult fieri; sed quæ reverentia legum,
Quis metus aut pudor est unquam properantis avari?

"This," says he, "is the cause of most sins: nor is there any vice of which the mind of man is capa-

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ble, that hath been guilty of more murders and poisonings, than a furious desire of immoderate wealth; for he that will be rich, will make haste to be so: and what reverence of laws, what fear of shame, was ever seen in any man that was in haste to be rich?" And this is the sense of what the apostle says concerning this vice of covetousness, this peremptory resolution of being rich: (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.) "They that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil." If this vice of covetousness once reign in us, if we have once fixed our end, and set up this resolution with ourselves that we will be rich, we shall then make every thing stoop and submit to this design. A covetous man will make his principles and his conscience to bend to his resolution of being rich, and to bow to that interest. The eager desire of riches makes men to pursue them in indirect and uncharitable ways, by falsehood and perjury, by undermining and overreaching, by dissembling and flattery, by corrupting and embasing of commodities, by false weights and measures, by taking fees with both hands, by making use of their power and wit to oppress and defraud their brother, by imposing upon his ignorance and simplicity, or by making a prey of his poverty and necessity.

Covetousness many times makes men cruel and unjust; nay, it makes them guilty of the worst sort of cruelty and oppression. For (as one says well) the covetous man oppresseth his neighbour not for any good to himself; for he does not enjoy what he tears and rends from others; so that he is of that most hateful kind of beasts of prey that kill other

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creatures, not to eat them, but that they may see them lie dead by them. Lions and wolves kill out of hunger; but the covetous man, like a serpent or scorpion, stings and bites others to death, not for his need, but for his pleasure and recreation. Covetousness is the parent of the most monstrous sins; because it fixeth a man in a resolution of getting an estate by any means. If falseness and deceit, violence and oppression, will further this end, the earnest desire of the end tempts men to use any sort of means whereby the end may be compassed; and though a man may have some averseness from them at first, yet that wears off by degrees, and the strong desire of the end reconciles a man at last to the love and liking of the means, how wicked and unwarrantable soever. Covetousness tempted Achan to steal the accursed thing, and Gehazi to lie to the prophet, and Ahab to oppress and murder Naboth. Nay, a small sum tempted the covetous mind of Judas to betray his Master and his Saviour. And how do many men every day strain their consciences to get an estate, and hazard their own souls for money; nay exchange their souls, which are of more value than the whole world, for a very small portion of it?

II. There are likewise many other temptations which a covetous man is exposed to in the keeping and securing an estate when he hath got it. A covetous and worldly-minded man, when it comes to the trial, is in great danger of quitting his religion, and "making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience." When his estate comes to be in hazard, he is very apt to fall off from the truth; it is a hundred to one but in these circumstances he will choose rather to violate his conscience than to for-

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feit his estate. What the devil falsely said of Job is true of the covetous man: "He does not serve God for nought." Upon these terms it was that Christ and the young man parted; "he had great possessions," and it troubled him to part with them. When Demas was brought to the trial, and put to it, whether he would stick to the profession of the gospel or his worldly possessions? he quitted St. Paul and declared for the world: (2 Tim. iv. 10.) "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." So far had his covetous humour besotted him, as to make him prefer his present interest in these temporal things before those eternal rewards which the gospel offered.

III. There are likewise many temptations which men are exposed to in the enjoying and spending of a great estate. It is hard to have a great estate and not to be mastered by the love of it; not to have our cares and thoughts, our hearts and affections swallowed up by it. It is no easy thing for a man that hath riches not to overvalue them, and love them more than he ought; not to be puffed up by them, and so place his trust and confidence in them: (Prov. xviii. 11.) "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit." The covetous man setteth up his riches in the place of God, and is apt "to fall down before his golden calf and worship it: to say to the gold, Thou art my hope, and to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence: to rejoice because his wealth is great, and because his hand hath gotten much."

Riches are a great temptation to irreligion and atheism. Upon this account Agur wisely prays to God for a moderate estate, because of the danger of both the extremes of riches and poverty; because

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of the great and violent temptations which men are exposed to in both these conditions: (Prov. xxx. 8, 9.) "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me." Why not riches? "Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" And much more do riches tempt men to pride and insolence towards others: (Prov. xviii. 23.) "The poor useth entreaties, but the rich answereth roughly." Men's spirits are commonly blown up and bloated with their fortunes, and their pride, and stomach, and passion, do usually increase in proportion to their wealth.

And many times riches tempt men to luxury and intemperance, and all manner of excess. Rich men have a mighty temptation to allow themselves all manner of unlawful pleasures; because he who hath a great estate is furnished with that to which hardly any thing can be denied. And this is not inconsistent with a covetous humour; for there are, many times, men who are covetous in getting, for no other end and reason but that they may spend it upon their lusts. As covetousness sometimes starves other vices, so sometimes it serves them, and is made subordinate to a man's ambition, or lust, or some other reigning vice. There is no such absolute inconsistency between riches and virtue, but that it is possible that a man that is very rich may be very good. But yet, if we consult experience, I doubt it will be found a true observation, that there are but very few rich men who are not insupportable, either for their vanity or their vices; so that our Saviour had reason for that severe question: "How hard is it for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God?" And well might he upon this account pronounce the poor (the poor in estate,

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as well as the poor in spirit) blessed, as we find he does: (Luke vi. 20.) "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." They oftener enter there than the rich.

Thirdly, Covetousness is likewise evil and unreasonable, because it is an endless and insatiable desire. A covetous mind may propose to itself some certain bounds and limits; and a man may think that when he is arrived to such an estate, and hath raised his fortune to such a pitch, that he will then sit down, contented and satisfied, and will seek after no more. But he deceives himself in this matter; for when he hath attained to that which he proposed to himself, he will be never the nearer being satisfied. So Solomon tells us: (Eccles. v. 10.) "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase;" for no degree of wealth can satisfy a covetous mind. He may think so beforehand, that if he had so much it would be enough; but when he hath attained it he will be still reaching after more; for covetousness is a disease of the mind, and an unnatural thirst which is inflamed by that which should quench it. Every desire that is natural is satisfied and at rest, when it hath once obtained the thing it desired. If a man be hungry, he is satisfied when he hath eaten; or if he be thirsty, his thirst is allayed and quenched when he hath drank to such a proportion as nature doth require; and if he eat and drink beyond this measure, nature is oppressed, and it is a burden to him. But covetousness is not the thirst of nature, but of a diseased mind. It is the thirst of a fever, or of a dropsy; the more a man drinks the more he desires, and the more he is inflamed. In like manner, the more the covetous man increaseth his estate,

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the more his desires are enlarged and extended, and he finds continually new occasions and new necessities; and every day as he grows richer, he discovers new wants; and a new poverty to be provided against, which he did not think of before, comes into his mind: *Et minus hæc optat, qui non habet;* "and he that is without these things covets them less than he that hath them." So far is a covetous man's attaining to riches from giving him satisfaction, that he who hath scarce any thing at all is many times much nearer to contentment than he that hath got so much; nay, so unreasonable is this appetite, as to desire more, even when the man knows not how to bestow what he hath already. This Solomon observed long since (for the vices and humours of men are much the same in all ages), Eccles. iv. 8. "There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labours, neither is his eye satisfied with riches, neither saith he, For whom do I labour and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail." And indeed what can be greater vanity and folly, than to be at certain pains and labour all the days of a man's life, and yet to be uncertain all the while for whom it is that he drudgeth and taketh all these pains?

And if this be the nature of this vice, the more it gets still to covet the more, then nothing can be more unreasonable than to think to gratify this appetite; because, at this rate, the man can never be contented, because he can never have enough; nay, so far is it from that, that every new accession to his fortune sets his desires one degree farther from rest and satisfaction; for a covetous mind having no bounds, it is very probable that the man's desire

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will increase much faster than his estate; and then the richer he is, still the poorer, because he is still the less contented with his condition. However, it is impossible that the man's desire should ever be satisfied; for desire being always first, if the man's desire of riches advanceth and goes forward as fast as riches follow, then it is not possible for riches ever to overtake the desire of them, no more than the hinder wheels of a coach can overtake those which are before; because, as they were at a distance at first setting out, so let them go never so far or so fast, they keep the same distance still.

So that it is the vainest thing in the world for a man to design his own satisfaction by the perpetual increase of his fortune, because contentment doth not arise from the abundance of what a man hath, but it must spring from the inward frame and temper of our minds; and the true way to it is not to enlarge our estate, but to contract our desires; and then it is possible that a man's money and his mind may meet; otherwise the pursuit is endless, and the farther a man follows contentment, it will but flee so much the farther from him; and when he hath attained the estate of a prince, and a revenue as great as that of France or the Turkish empire, he shall be farther from being satisfied than when he began the world, and had no more beforehand than would just pay for his next meal.

I should now have proceeded to the fourth thing, whereby the unreasonableness of covetousness doth appear; because the happiness of human life doth not consist in riches. And this is the argument which I shall more especially insist upon, because it is that which our Saviour useth here in the text to take men off from this vice: "The life of man

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consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." And this, certainly, is one of the best and most reasonable considerations in the world, to moderate men's affections towards these things. Every reasonable desire propounds some end to itself. Now to what purpose should any man desire to increase his wealth so vastly beyond the proportion of his necessities and real occasions? What benefit and advantage would it be to any man to have a hundred times more than he knows what to do withal? But I shall not enlarge upon this argument at present, but refer it to another opportunity.

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SERMON XCI.

THE EVIL AND UNREASONABLENESS OF COVETOUSNESS.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.— LUKE xii. 15.

AFTER I had, in my first discourse upon this subject, given you an account of the nature of the vice of covetousness, I proceeded in the next place to represent the great evil and unreasonableness of it.

First, Because it takes men off from religion and the care of their souls.

Secondly, Because it tempts men to many things which are inconsistent with religion, and directly contrary to it.

Thirdly, Because it is an endless and insatiable desire. Thus far I have gone; I proceed to the

Fourth thing, whereby the unreasonableness of covetousness will yet farther appear: namely, because the happiness of human life doth not consist in riches and abundance. And this I shall insist upon somewhat the more largely, because it is the argument which our Saviour makes use of here in the text, to take men off from this sin: "The life of man consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. Therefore, take heed, and beware of covetousness." And this, certainly,

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is one of the best and most reasonable considerations in the world to moderate our affections towards these things. For every reasonable desire propounds some end to itself. Now to what purpose should any man desire to increase his wealth so vastly, and beyond the proportion of his necessities and real occasions? What benefit and advantage can it be to any man, to have a hundred or perhaps a thousand times more than he knows what to do withal?

And as for the other world, no man ever pretended that the heaping up riches here would be useful to him there; "riches will not deliver him in the day of wrath." No man was ever so senseless as to imagine that he could take his estate along with him into the other world; or if he could, that heaven was to be bought with money; or that a great estate, or a great many lordships, would recommend him to the favour of God. It is true, indeed, a man may so use riches in this world, as thereby to promote and further his happiness in the next. But then it is likewise as true, that a man may so demean himself in a poor and low condition as thereby to render himself as acceptable to God, and capable of as great a reward, as the richest man can do. The poor woman's two mites, cheerfully given to pious and charitable uses, will go as far in the other world, and find as great a reward there, as the rich man's thousands of gold and silver. And a man may be as truly generous and charitable out of a little, as out of the greatest fortune. Besides that, the poor man's contentedness in a mean condition is more admirable in itself, and more valuable with God, than for a rich man to be so.

So that the great use of riches respects this world,

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and the best use of them is in ways of charity; and the poor man's charity, though it cannot be of so great an extent in the effects of it, yet in the degree of its virtue and merit it may be equal to it.

Now the two great designs of men, in regard to this world, are these:

1. To maintain and support our lives as long as we can.

2. To make our lives as truly happy and comfortable as we can.

To the first of these ends, namely, the support of our lives, a very little will suffice; and it is not much that is necessary to the other, to render our lives as truly comfortable as this world can make them; so that a vast estate is not necessary to either of these ends; for a man may live by having what is necessary, and may live comfortably by having that which is convenient.

No man lives the longer by having abundance; it is many times an occasion of shortening a man's life by ministering to excess and intemperance, but seldom of prolonging it.[7] And, setting aside the vain fancy and conceit of men, no man lives the more happily for having more than he hath real use and occasion for.

These two heads I shall at present speak to, to make out the full force of this reason which our Saviour here useth; namely, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

I. That riches do not contribute to the support of our lives; nor,

II. To the happiness and comfort of them. That is, they are not necessary to either of these ends. For by riches, I mean whatever is beyond a

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sufficient competency of those things which are requisite to the real uses and occasions of human life.

First, Riches and abundance do not contribute to the support of our lives. And this our Saviour very well represents to us in the parable, immediately after the text, of the rich man who was continually increasing his estate, so that "he had goods laid up for many years;" but he lived not one jot the longer for being provided of the conveniences of life for so long a time beforehand; for whilst he was blessing himself as if he had secured his happiness sufficiently for this world, he was uncertain of his continuance in it; God having decreed to take him out of this world, at that very time when he had determined to enter upon the enjoyment of those things which he had been so long laying up. God says to him, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, and then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" that is, what good then will all these things do thee, when thou hast no further use of and occasion for them? So that if he had been the poorest man in the world, and had not been provided for the next meal, he might have lived as long as he did with all his stores. You see, then, that in this sense, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." For, notwithstanding all his great barns, and the abundance of fruits he had stowed in them, he did not live one jot the longer than the poorest man might have done.

Secondly, Nor do riches contribute to the happiness and comfort of our lives. Happiness is not to be bought and purchased together with great lordships; it depends upon a great many causes, among

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which a competency of the things of this world is one; but riches and abundance is none of them. The happiness of this world consists in these two things.

1. In the enjoyment of good. And,

2. In a state of freedom from evil.

Now riches do not necessarily make a man happy in either of these respects.

First, For the enjoyment of good, a competent estate suitable to the condition and station in which God hath set us in this world, will give a man whatever nature and reason can desire, and abundance cannot make a man happier. If a man had a hundred times more than he needed, he could but enjoy it according to the capacity of a man; for if he consulted his own happiness, and would truly enjoy what he hath, he must eat and drink within the bounds of temperance and health, and must wear no more clothes than are for his convenience. It is true he hath wherewithal to put on a new suit every day, which is to be uneasy all the days of his life; and may drink, if he pleases, every time out of a new cup, which would be a vain expense and a great trouble to his servants, without any manner of convenience to himself.

But then if riches fall into the covetous man's hands they can be no happiness to him, because he hath no heart to enjoy them. He hath indeed the estate of a rich man, but he wants the comfort of it, because he hath the mind of a poor man, and enjoyment is all the felicity that is in a great fortune; what we enjoy is ours, but what we lay up is, from that time, not ours but somebody's else. He that heaps up riches, and enjoys them not, is rich only for his heir, but a beggar for himself.

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We are apt to pity poor men, and too apt to despise them; but surely no man's condition is more to be deplored than his, who starves himself in the midst of plenty, and being surrounded with the blessings of God turns them into the greatest curse; for it is a much greater curse, not to use an estate when one has it, than not to have it. It is like a plentiful table without an appetite.

But it may be it is a great happiness to have a great estate, though a man never use it; the pleasure of seeing it and telling it over may be like the removing of billets; which may warm a man as much as if he had spent and consumed them. But this is real, and the other only imaginary. I doubt not many covetous men take a great deal of pleasure in ruminating upon their wealth, and in recounting what they have; but they have a great deal of tormenting care and fear about it, and if they had not, it is very hard to understand where the reasonable pleasure and happiness lies of having things to no end. It is, at the best, like that of some foolish birds, which, they say, take pleasure in stealing money that they may hide it; as if it were worth the while for men to take pains to dig silver out of the earth, for no other purpose but to melt it down and stamp it, and bury it there again.

But many necessities may happen, which we cannot foresee, and it is good to provide against them. There is nothing so bad, but something may be said in excuse of it; and I do not deny, but that a provident care against the common accidents of human life is very commendable; but it is unreasonable to think of providing against all possibilities, which it is impossible either to foresee or prevent. It is very possible, that after a man hath gotten the greatest estate

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imaginable, he may lose it all by some fatal accident; and then to what purpose was all this provision made, when that, which was so long a time a getting and laying up, is lost at once?

Besides that, it is not easy to conceive what necessity can happen to a covetous man to give him an occasion of using his estate; he cannot find in his heart to bestow it upon himself in such things as are convenient, nay almost necessary for the support of his life; for no man can feed his servants more penuriously than he does himself; all the religion he values himself upon, is a strict observance of the Lessian diet which he recommends to those few that can deny themselves to dine with him, in hopes to make better meals upon his estate when he is gone. And if he be so penurious to himself, the necessities of others are not like to move him to be liberal. I can but imagine one occasion that could tempt such a man to lay out what he hath; namely, when one part of his estate is in danger, to spend the other to secure it. And yet, even in that case, if his cause were not very clear and good, he would go nigh to lose it, using it as he does himself; that is, by starving it. And if this be all, then a man had as good be without an estate, and save himself the trouble either of getting it or securing it; for if it were all gone, he might live as well as he does, and that with half the care and pains.

Secondly, The happiness of this world consists in a state of freedom from evil. Now the great evils that men are liable to in this world are such as are incident to them, either in the course of their lives or at the time of their death; and riches do not contribute to men's happiness by freeing them from either of these. I shall speak to these severally.

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I. Not from the evils which are incident to men in the course of their lives. These are of two kinds, inward or outward.

1. Inward evils, by which I mean those of the mind; and our greatest troubles are from within, from the anxiety of our minds and the guilt of our consciences, from the vicious inclinations of our wills, and the irregularity and disorders of our passions. Now riches were an admirable thing indeed, and worth our coveting, if they would help to cure these distempers of our minds; but they are the least fitted for such a purpose of any thing in the world; for not he that hath the greatest estate, but he that hath the fewest and most reasonable desires, and the best governed passions and the most virtuous inclinations, is the happiest man, and dwells nearest to satisfaction. *Nemo malus felix*, "no bad man can be happy," though he were possessed of the whole world; because he hath that within him which frets and discontents him, which galls his spirit and keeps his mind restless and uneasy; and he that does not enjoy himself can enjoy nothing else.

Did but men know how much happiness hath been enjoyed by many a pious and virtuous man in a mean fortune, how quiet and easy their minds have been, how much fuller of joy and pleasure, than the heart of any covetous worldling ever was in his most prosperous estate, and when his corn, and wine, and oil abounded; did we, I say, but know this, we should not envy the men of mighty fortunes. *Nam neque divitibus contingunt gaudia solis;* "Rich men are not the only happy people in the world." If they be not good as well as rich, happiness is a greater stranger to their dwellings than to the cottages of poorer men.

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Now riches are so far from helping to make men good, that they are one of the greatest temptations to them in the world to be otherwise; which is the reason why our Saviour says, it is so very hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven; because, considering the powerful and almost irresistible temptations of a great estate, and the impotency and weakness of human nature to govern itself in a plentiful fortune, it is very hard for a rich man to be so good as he ought, it requires a great force and firmness of resolution, a very solid and vigorous constitution of mind, to bear a great fortune, and not to be corrupted by it; and a man hath never more reason to implore God's gracious help and assistance, and to consult his own best and coolest thoughts, to know what he ought to do, and how he ought to demean himself, than when the outward blessings of this life flow in amain upon him; *felicitate corrumpimur*, "nothing sooner debaucheth men than prosperity;" and he is a very happy man whom wealth and a good fortune do not make licentious and dissolute; because these tempt men with the power and opportunity to do all the ill that their wicked hearts can design or desire.

The temptation of riches, and the power that goes along with them, is so forcible and prevalent, that the devil, who is a sagacious spirit, and hath great and long experience in this kind, when he was making the experiment, whether Christ was a mere man or the Son of God, reserved this for his last temptation, resolving, if that would not do, to try him no farther. After he had assaulted him in several kinds, he represents to him at last that which was sufficient to have surfeited two of the most insatiable desires of human nature, ambition and covetousness, even

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"all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, in a moment (or point) of time;" he brings all the rays of this glory to one point, that the temptation might kindle and take hold the sooner; and says to him, "all this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." He supposed, with great probability, that, if he were but a mere man, the strongest and most resolved mind would bend and yield to so dazzling a temptation as this; but when he saw that this temptation was rejected, he found himself baffled and gave him over; since this did not move him, he concluded now that he was the Son of God indeed, and that it was in vain to tempt him any farther.

From all this it appears, that riches are so far from making men virtuous, that nothing is more dangerous to virtue than a full condition, if men have not a great degree of grace, as well as discretion, to manage it. Solomon tells us, that the prosperity of fools destroyeth them.

And yet how do most of us court this temptation, and are forward to thrust and venture ourselves upon it? there are a great many other things, in which most men make a right judgment of themselves, and will readily acknowledge that they are altogether unfit for them. Every man will not take upon him to be a physician, or a lawyer, to prescribe medicines in dangerous cases, and to give counsel to men in knotty and difficult points about their estates; but every man thinks himself fit enough to be rich, and sufficiently qualified to manage a great estate if he can but get it; when perhaps there are few things in the world, which men are more insufficient for, than to wield and govern a great fortune, nor wherein there is greater danger of miscarriage. It

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is not every body's talent to be wealthy and wise, rich and innocent.

2. As for the outward evils of this life, such as want and contempt, bodily pains and diseases, unhappiness in friends and relations, a great estate is by no means a sufficient security or remedy to a covetous man against these.

(1.) As for want. And surely one would think, that if riches were good for any thing they are a very proper remedy against this evil, and a most certain and infallible cure of it; but experience tells us quite otherwise. Socrates was wont to say, that, "To want nothing is the privilege of the Deity, and proper to God alone; but to stand in need of as few things as may be, is the privilege of a wise and good man, and a state of happiness next to that of God himself; because he that hath the fewest wants is the most easily supplied, and is next to him that is self-sufficient." Now a man of moderate desires hath infinitely fewer wants than a covetous man; and because his desires are moderate, a moderate estate will satisfy them: but the wants of a covetous mind are never to be supplied, because it hath ordered the matter so cunningly as to want even that which it hath: such a man does not get riches to supply his wants, but is content to want that he may be rich; insomuch that he hath not the heart to use his estate for the supply of his real necessities. How many do almost starve themselves in the midst of plenty and abundance? There is no greater sign of poverty than to be deeply in debt; now the covetous man lives and dies in debt to himself. Some men have been so shamefully penurious and stingy to themselves as even to die to save charges, which yet perhaps is the most generous thing they ever did

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in their whole lives, in respect to the world; because by this means somebody may come to the enjoyment of their estates; and that great dunghill which they have been so long in raking together, may by this means come to be spread abroad for the public benefit.

So that if a covetous man were possessed of the wealth of both the Indies, all this would not free him from want. A poor man's wants may be satisfied, when he hath obtained what he wants: but the covetous man labours of an incurable want; because he wants that which he hath, as well as that which he hath not.

(2.) As for contempt, riches will not secure a covetous man against this neither; nay, so far is it from that, that he is commonly more ridiculous and despised for living poor in the midst of abundance, than if he were really so. Did I say really so? He is the most really poor of all other men. For, as one says well, "The rich poor man is emphatically poor."

(3.) Neither will riches free men from bodily illness and pain. The rich are liable to as many diseases, and as sharp pains, as the poor, and they have commonly less patience to bear them than the poor; because they have not been inured to other sorts of evils. They that have been accustomed to labour, are generally best fitted to bear pain; the rich are commonly more tender and delicate, and have a quicker sense of pain, more matter, and greater quantity of humours to feed a disease, and to inflame it to a greater height.

I must not here forget that there is a sort of rich men, I mean the penurious misers, who starve themselves more than the poor, and fare many times

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more hardly; and, for this reason, though they be not in danger of the diseases that come from intemperance and a plentiful table, yet they are liable to the diseases which proceed from starving and emptiness; which the physicians say are more dangerous than the other: so that neither the prodigal nor the niggardly rich man is secured from bodily pains and diseases by a great estate.

(4.) Neither will riches secure a man from being unhappy in his friends and relations. A great estate will not make a man's children either more dutiful or wise than the children of meaner persons; and if they be not so, his estate cannot be so great a happiness to him, as they may prove an affliction. Solomon tells us, that the very fear and apprehension of this did very much embitter the fruit of all his labour; and he seems to speak it sensibly, and very probably with a melancholy reflection upon his son Rehoboam: (Eccles. ii. 18, 19.) "Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun, because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me; and who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Yet shall he have rule over all my labour, wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun." "Who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?" he seems to speak doubtfully: but he had a very shrewd guess what kind of man his son would make; for he speaks more despondingly in the next words: (ver. 20, 21.) "Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun;" that is, when I thought seriously of it, I began to think, that all the pains I had taken to get an estate would be but to little purpose; "for there is a man (saith he) whose la-

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bour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity (that is, who by wise and honest means hath raised a great estate); yet to a man that hath not laboured therein (that is, to a man who is endowed with none of these qualities) shall he leave it for his portion; this also is vanity, and a great evil."

And as for friends, though the rich man have many that will call themselves so, yet he had almost as good have none; for he can hardly ever know whether they be so or not, unless he chance to fall into poverty; and then, indeed, the change of his condition may give him that advantage and opportunity, which otherwise he is never like to have, of discerning between his friends and his flatterers. Thus you see that riches are no security against the most considerable evils which attend us in the course of our lives.

II. When we come to die, nothing will minister less comfort to us, at that time, than a great estate. It is then a very small pleasure to a man to reflect how much he hath gotten in the world, when he sees that he must leave it; nay, like the young man in the gospel, he goes away so much the more "sorrowful, because he hath great possessions." All the things of this world seem very inconsiderable to a man, when he approaches to the confines of the other: for when he sees that he must leave this world, then he would fain make a virtue of necessity, and begins to change his apprehensions of these things, and to have very slight and mean thoughts of them, when he is convinced he can enjoy them no longer. What the philosopher was wont to say of the pleasures of this world, is as true of riches, and all the other enjoyments of it; that, "if they did but put on the same countenance,

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and look with the same face, when they come to us, that they will do when they turn from us, and take their leave of us, we should hardly entertain them."

Now if a man have placed his chief happiness in this world, as the covetous man does in his riches, his great trouble, when he comes to die, will be, that he must leave them. Nothing could be more severely said to the covetous man, than that which God says to the rich man in the parable: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, and then whose shall these things be?" For of all things in the world, such men cannot endure to think of parting with these things, or that what they have got, with such great care and labour, should come to the possession of another.

And therefore, when we are so hot and eager in the pursuit of these things, we should do well to consider how they will appear to us in a dying hour. And this consideration well imprinted upon our minds would make us very careful, to treasure up other kind of comforts to ourselves against such a time, and to labour after those things which we shall never grow out of conceit withal, but shall value them to the last, and then most of all when we come to die, and leave this world. For as a poet of our own says excellently,

> 'Tis not that which first we love;
> But what dying we approve.

Thus I have done with the fourth thing, whereby the evil and unreasonableness of covetousness doth appear; namely, that the happiness of human life doth not consist in a great estate; "the life of man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The great ends of religion,

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and covetousness are very different. The great end which religion proposeth to itself is happiness; but the great end which covetousness proposeth is riches; which are neither a necessary nor a probable means of happiness. I should now have proceeded to the fifth and last particular; namely, that riches are so far from being the happiness of human life, that they usually contribute very much to our misery and sorrow; as will appear, if we consider these four things.

First, The labour and care which covetous men are at in the getting of a great estate.

Secondly, The anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of losing it.

Thirdly, The trouble and vexation of losing it; and,

Fourthly, The dreadful and heavy account which every man must give of a great estate. But these particulars, together with the application of this whole discourse, I shall refer to another opportunity.

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SERMON XCII.

THE EVIL AND UNREASONABLENESS OF COVETOUSNESS.

And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.—LUKE xii. 15.

IN my two last discourses on this subject, I have represented the evil and unreasonableness of the vice of covetousness in four particulars. I proceed now to the fifth and last particular, whereby I told you the evil and unreasonableness of it would appear; viz.

That riches are so far from being the happiness of human life, that they usually contribute very much to our misery and sorrow; as will evidently appear, if we consider these four things:

First, The labour and care which the covetous man is at in getting of a great estate.

Secondly, The anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of losing it.

Thirdly, The trouble and vexation of having lost it.

Fourthly, The heavy and dreadful account which every man must give of a great estate.

First, The labour and care which the covetous man hath in getting a great estate. He that will be rich must sweat for it, and refuse no pains and trouble; he must "rise up early and lie down late, and eat the bread of carefulness." A slave that digs in the mines, or rows in the galleys, is not a

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greater drudge than some covetous worldlings are; only, with this difference, that the covetous man thinks that he labours and takes all these pains for himself; whereas the slave understands the matter more truly, and thinks that he does it for another.

But besides the pains he takes, he is full of care and anxiety. How is he, through the greedy desire of having, racked between the hopes of getting and the fear of missing what he seeks? The apostle observes what tormenting cares accompany this vice: (1 Tim. vi. 10.) "The love of money (saith he) is the root of all evil;" not only of the evil of sin, but of the evil likewise of trouble and disquiet. For it follows, "which, while some coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows:" variety of troubles attend them that will be rich.

Secondly, If we consider the anxiety of keeping what they have got, together with the fear of losing it again, this is another great part of a covetous man's infelicity. The rich man here in the parable after the text, when he saw his estate coming upon him so fast, cries out, "what shall I do?" Poor man! who would not pity his condition, to see him put to this difficulty and distress, and to hear him make as heavy a moan as the poorest man could do! Now that he hath a plentiful harvest, and his crop hath answered, if it were possible, his covetous desire, he is in a great deal of perplexity, and almost at his wits' end how to dispose of it: he was horribly afraid lest any of it should be lost for want of a secure place to store it up in: "what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" Where was the difficulty of this? Why, he was loath to lose his fruits, and he was loath to lay out money to

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secure them. But, upon farther consideration, he resolves of the two evils to choose the least: "and he said, This will I do, I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." But why could he not let the barns he had stand, and build more? No, that he did not think so well, he loved to see all his good things at one view, and what a goodly show they would make together. Besides that, it is the humour of covetousness, when it breaks out into expense, to over-do; the miser's buildings are like his feasts, always extravagant. The covetous man (as to the business of expense) is like a coward as to fighting, he declines it as long as he can; but when he is pushed to the last necessity, he grows desperate and lays about him.

Tantis parta malis, cura majore metuque
Servantur; misera est magni custodia census.

Riches, which are got with so much trouble, are not kept without greater fear and care. A covetous man is in nothing more miserable, than in the anxiety and care of disposing and securing what he hath got. When a man's desires are endless, his cares and fears will be so too.

Thirdly, As great an evil as any of the former, is, the vexation of having lost these things. If by any accident the man happens to be deprived of them, then he takes on heavily, hangs down his head and mourns, "as a man would do for his first-born;" and is ready to cry out with Micah, "they have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" Upon every little loss the covetous man is undone, though he have a hundred times more left than he knows what to do withal. So deeply are the hearts of

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earthly-minded men many times pierced with earthly losses, as with Rachel to "refuse to be comforted." Nay, St. Paul observes, that "the sorrow of the world sometimes worketh death." (2 Cor. vii. 10.)

Fourthly, But the saddest consideration of all is, that heavy and dreadful account that must one day be given both of the getting and using of a great estate. They that have got an estate by fraud and falsehood, or by oppression and grinding the face of the poor, may read their doom at large: (James v. 1—5.) "Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you; your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten; your gold and silver are cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire: ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries of them which have reaped, are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabbaoth; ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton, ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter."

And we must be accountable likewise for the using of our estates. God gives them to us in trust, and the greater they are the more we are to account for; so much as we need is ours, but beyond what will support us, and be a convenient provision for our families, in the rank God hath placed them; all that is given to us, that we may give it to others: and indeed it is not ours; we are the proprietors of it in respect of men, but in respect of God we are but trustees and stewards, and God will require an account of us how we have disposed of it.

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And can there be a more reigning madness among men, than to take care only to increase their account more and more by receiving much; whereas our great care and concernment should be to clear our account, by laying out what we receive, according to the trust reposed in us? How much we shall receive of the things of this world, is in the care and will of our Master; but our care and fidelity are seen in laying it out as we ought. Among men (says one) it is well enough if a steward can give an account of so much laid out, and so much in cash, and upon this he shall have his discharge: but we cannot this way clear our account with God; for it is not offering him his own again that will satisfy him, as we may learn from the parable of the talents. So that upon the whole matter, we should be so far from envying the rich, that we should rather envy the safety and happiness of those who are not entrusted with such dangerous blessings, and who are free from the temptations of a plentiful fortune, and the curse of a covetous mind, and from the heavy account of a great estate.

I come now, in the last place, to make some application of this discourse to ourselves.

I. Let our Saviour's caution take place with us, let these words of his sink into our minds: "Take heed and beware of covetousness." Our Saviour, I told you, doubles the caution, that we may double our care. It is a sin very apt to steal upon us, and slily to insinuate itself into us under the specious pretence of industry in our callings, and a provident care of our families: but however it may be coloured over, it is a great evil dangerous to ourselves, and mischievous to the world. Now to kill this vice in us, besides the considerations beforementioned

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taken from the evil and unreasonableness of it, I will urge these three more:

1. That the things of this world are uncertain.

2. That our lives are as uncertain as these things: and,

3. That there is another life after this.

1. The uncertainty of the things of this world. This should very much cool our affections toward them, that, after all our care and diligence for the obtaining of them, we are not sure to enjoy them; we may be deprived of them by a thousand accidents. This consideration Solomon urgeth, to take men off from an over-eager pursuit of these things: (Prov. xxiii. 5.) "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven." After we have sat brooding over an estate many years, it may all on a sudden, before we are aware, take wing and "fly away, like an eagle towards heaven," soaring suddenly out of our sight, and never to return again.

And the same argument St. Paul useth, to take off men's affections from the world, (1 Cor. vii. 31.) because "the fashion of this world passeth away;" παράγει τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου. He compares the things of this world to a scene which is presently changed, and vanisheth almost as soon as it appears. Now, seeing these things are so uncertain, we should take heed how we fix our hearts too much upon them; we should not make love to any thing that is so fickle and inconstant as this world is. We should be afraid to contract too near and intimate a friendship with any thing which will forsake us, after we have courted it with so much importunity, and purchased it with so much pains, and endeavoured to secure it with so much caution and tenderness.

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2. Our lives are as uncertain as these things. If our estates remain with us, we are continually in danger of being removed from them. And (as one says) it is folly to build our hopes upon a match, where both parties are so uncertain and inconstant. Why should we place our dearest affections upon things, which we are sure not to enjoy one moment? "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee, and then whose shall those things be?" I remember Seneca tells us a real story, just answerable to the rich man in the parable, of an acquaintance of his, who by long and great industry had arrived to a vast estate; and, just when he began to enjoy it, after one of the first good meals which, perhaps, he ever made in his life, that very night his soul was taken from him; for presently after supper he died. *In ipso actu bene sedentium rerum, in ipso procurrentis fortunæ impetu.* "In the height of his prosperity, and in the full career of his good fortune."

But if we live to enjoy for any time what we have got, we should remember that our life is but a passage through the world, and that we are but "pilgrims and strangers in the world as all our fathers were, that we have here no abiding place, no continuing city," but are travelling towards our own country. And why should we load ourselves whilst we are upon our journey, and cumber ourselves with those things which will be of no use to us there, where we are going.

But the great wonder of all is, that this vice should so strongly reign, and even grow upon men in old age, and get strength as weakness creeps upon us. This very thought, that we are to die, should work in us a great indifferency towards the things of this world. But when men are convinced

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they cannot live long, and that every step they take they are in danger of stumbling into the grave, this, one would think, should wean our affections from this world; and yet, usually, none take so fast hold of it, and embrace it so kindly, as old men; like friends, who, though they know they must leave one another, yet are loath to part. Do we not see many pursue these things with as much eagerness and appetite when they are leaving the world, as if they were to stay in it a hundred years longer? so that, in this sense also, they are children again, and are as fond of these toys as if they were just beginning the world, and setting out for their whole life.

3. There is another life after this to be seriously thought on, and provided for with great care; and did men firmly believe this, they would not, with Martha, "busy themselves about the many things, but would mind the one thing necessary," and, with Mary, "choose that better part," which could not be taken from them. They would overlook the trifles of this world, and scarce take notice of "the things which are seen," but be only intent upon "the things which are not seen; because the things which are seen are but temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." The great concernments of another world would employ their utmost care and their best thoughts.

Whilst we are in this world, we should remember that this is not our home, nor the place of our rest; and therefore, as men do in an inn, we should make a shift with those indifferent accommodations which the world will afford us, and which we can have upon easy terms, without too much trouble and stir, because we are not to continue long here; and, in the mean time, we should cheer up ourselves with

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the thoughts of the pleasure and the plenty of our Father's house, and of that full contentment and satisfaction which we shall meet withal, when we come to those everlasting habitations.

So that our great care should be to provide for eternity. If we have unbounded desires, let us place them upon such objects as are worthy of them. Let us earnestly covet the best things, and seek after the true riches. We should so mind the world, as to make heaven our great care; as to make sure to "provide ourselves bags that wax not old; a treasure in the heavens, that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth," as our Saviour adviseth. (Luke xii. 33.) To the same purpose is the counsel of St. Paul: (1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19.) "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be rich in good works, willing to distribute, ready to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation (or, as the word θεμέλιος may also be rendered, a good treasure) against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life."

I have told you, that all these things will fail in a short space; we shall either be stripped of them, or separated from them when we come to die, and shall look over to that vast eternity which we must shortly enter upon; this world, and all the enjoyments of it, will then be as nothing to us, and we shall be wholly taken up with the thoughts of another world, and be heartily sorry that the things of this world have taken up so much of our time and care, and that the great and weighty concernments of all eternity have been so little minded and regarded by us. Now seeing all these things shall be, pardon me, if I earnestly beg of you, in the midst of all your worldly cares, to have some consideration for your

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immortal souls, which are in no wise provided for by a great estate, but are designed for nobler enjoyments than this world can afford. When you are taking care to feed and clothe these dying bodies, remember that better part of yourselves which is to live for ever. Let not all your inquiry be, "What shall I eat? or what shall I drink? or wherewithal shall I be clothed?" But sometimes ask yourselves this question, "What shall I do to be saved?" I have an immortal spirit, it is but fit some care should be taken of that, to train it up to eternity, and to make it "fit to be made partaker of an inheritance among them that are sanctified."

The firm belief and serious consideration of the great things of another world, cannot surely but cool the heat of our affections towards these dying and perishing things, and make us resolved not to do any thing whereby we may violate the peace of our consciences, or forfeit our interest and happiness in another world.

II. By way of remedy against this vice of covetousness, it is good for men to be contented with their condition. This the apostle prescribes as the best cure of this vice, (Heb. xiii. 5.) "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have;" ἀρκούμενοι τοῖς παροῦσιν, being contented with the present, and thinking that sufficient. A covetous man cannot enjoy the present for fear of the future; either out of fear that he shall come to want, or out of a sickness and uneasiness of mind, which makes that nothing pleaseth him; but, if we could bring our minds to our condition, and be contented with what we have, we should not be so eager and impatient after more.

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This contentedness with our present condition doth not hinder, but that men, by providence and industry and lawful endeavours, may lay the foundation of a more plentiful fortune than they have at present. For provided a man use no indirect and dishonest ways to increase his estate, and do not torment himself with anxious cares; do neither make himself guilty, nor miserable, that he may be rich; provided he do not neglect better things, to attain these, and have not an insatiable appetite towards them; provided he do not idolize his estate, and set his heart upon these things; and if he can find in his heart to enjoy them himself, and to be charitable to others; nothing hinders but that he may be contented with his present condition, and yet take all fair opportunities, which the providence of God puts into his hands, of enlarging his fortune. It is a good character which the poet gives of Aristippus:

Omnis Aristippum decuit color, et status, et res;
Tentantem majora, fere præsentibus æquum.

"Every state and condition became him; for though he endeavoured after more, yet his mind was always in a manner equal to his present condition."

But if a man be discontented with the present, and restless because he hath no more, the whole world will not satisfy him; and if God should raise him from one step to another, he would never think his fortune high enough, and in every degree of it would be as little contented as he was at first. Our Saviour represents this sort of men by the rich man here in the parable, who, when his barns were full, and ready to crack, his mind was not filled; therefore he pulls them down and builds greater; and if

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he had lived till these had been full, they must have gone down too, and he would still have built greater. So that though he designed when he had raised his estate to such a pitch, to have set down and taken his ease, yet his covetous humour would have been stirring again, and still have stepped in between him and contentment, and for ever have hindered him from arriving at it.

III. By way of direction, I would persuade those who are rich to be charitable with what they have. If God hath blessed us with abundance, and we would not be like this rich man here in the parable, we must lay out of our estates, in ways of piety and charity, for the public good, and for the private relief of those who are in want; for that is the ἀπόδοσις, or moral of the parable; so "is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich towards God." So shall he be; such an issue of his folly may every one expect (to be taken away from his estate before he comes to enjoy it), who "layeth up treasures for himself, but is not rich towards God;" but does not lay up riches with God. How is that? by works of mercy, and charity. This our Saviour calls "laying up for ourselves treasure in heaven;" (Matth. vi, 20.) and at the 33d verse of this chapter, he calls giving of alms, "providing for ourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens which faileth not:" they who do thus, who "are rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate," are said to "lay up for themselves a good treasure against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life," (1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.) *Extra fortunam est quicquid donatur;* "Whatsoever we give to the poor is safely disposed, and put out of the reach of fortune, because it is laid up in heaven,

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where we may expect the return and recompence of it." Charity to our poor brethren is a certain way of transmitting our riches into the other world to make way for our reception there. So our Lord tells us: (Luke xvi. 9.) "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail (that is, when you shall leave this world and the enjoyments of it), they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

At the great day of judgment, when we shall all appear before God, and, according to our Saviour's representation of the proceedings of that day, shall hear him thus expostulating with men, "I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not;" what would we then give, how much of our estates, if we had them then at our command, would we not be willing to part withal, to have that comfortable sentence passed upon us, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world!" But if we be found among those who would spare nothing out of their abundance to any charitable use and purpose; I have not the heart to tell you how miserable the condition of such persons will be, and how dreadful a doom will be passed upon them.

It is a sad consideration, that there are some persons in the world who seem to be only defective in this duty; like the young man in the gospel, who lacked but this one thing to make him perfect; he had kept the commandments from his youth, and preserved himself from those gross sins which the law did plainly forbid; and yet, for want of this one thing, he parted from his Saviour, and, for any thing

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we know, fell short of eternal life. There are many who are very devout and religious, much in prayer and fasting, and all the other frugal exercises of piety, which cost them no money; but yet are very defective in alms and charity, which in Scripture are so frequently joined with the fasting and prayers of good men; and, by this means, all their devotion and diligence in the other parts of religion is lost, and will not bring them to heaven. And is it not great pity, that they who are not far from the kingdom of God should fall short of it? that they who in most other things bid so fair for heaven, should break with God upon this single point?

I know men have several ways to deceive their own hearts, and to defend themselves against all these assaults.

First, They say, they are injurious to no man in not being charitable. And it is true, that in human courts the poor can have no action against the rich for want of charity to them; but yet, for all that, they do injuriously detain that which doth not of right belong to them. They are cruel and hard-hearted, and they are guilty of a high breach of trust in respect of God, whose stewards they are, and who hath dealt so liberally with them in the things of this life, on purpose to oblige them to be so to others. That which thou storest up, without regard to the necessities of others, is unlawfully detained by thee, since God intended it should have been for bread to the hungry, and clothes to the naked, and for help and relief of those who are ready to perish. For why art thou rich, and another poor; but that thou mightest exercise thy charity upon those fitting objects which the providence of God presents to thee? It had been easy for God (since "the earth is his, and

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the fulness thereof") so to have contrived things, that every man should have had a sufficiency, and have been in a moderate condition; but then a great many virtues would have been shut out of the world, and lost for want of opportunity to exercise them. Where then had been the poor man's patience, and the rich man's pity, and the contentedness of men of moderate fortune?

Secondly, Men say that they have children to provide for. And do so, in God's name, for he allows us to do it liberally; but unless their condition and wealth set them above an ordinary calling, do not choose so to provide for them, as to take them off from all employment, lest you put them in the ready way to be undone; have a care of leaving them no other business, but to spend what you have left them; if you do so, they will in all probability do that work very effectually, and make as much haste to be poor, as you did to make them rich. If men could be but contented to do that which is best for their children, they might do a great deal better for themselves, by disposing what they have to spare in charity.

Thirdly, Others would fain excuse themselves from this duty, at present, by telling what they intend to do when they come to die; that is, when they can keep what they have no longer. It seems, then, thou wilt leave it to thy executor to do good in thy stead. This shews thou hast no great heart to the business, when thou deferrest it as long as ever thou canst. But why wilt thou trust another with the disposal of thy charity, rather than thyself? This is hardly to offer either a reasonable, or a living sacrifice to God, to do good only when we are dead. It is well that God hath made all men mortal, and that

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it is appointed for all men once to die; otherwise some men would never do good at all.

Wherefore, setting aside these, and all other excuses, which will not be admitted, nor will any of us have the face to plead them at the day of judgment; I say, setting aside all excuses whatsoever, let us resolve to do good with what we have whilst we can; and to that end let us lay aside some portion of what God hath blessed us withal, for the uses of piety and charity, and let it bear some decent proportion to what God hath given us.

There is never want of proper objects for our largest charity, and now less than ever. Besides these at home, which present themselves to us in great numbers every day, God hath sent us many from abroad, who call loud upon us for our pity and help, both as they are reduced to the greatest extremity, and are sufferers in the best cause, that of our common religion, which ought now to be dearer to us than ever. Let us shew mercy now, as we expect mercy from others, in any day of our distress in this world, and as ever we hope, whenever we come to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to find mercy with the Lord in that day.

Consider what I have said upon this argument, and let this extraordinary kind of caution, which our Saviour here gives, make a deep impression upon your minds; "Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

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SERMON XCIII.

RELIGION, OUR FIRST AND GREAT CONCERNMENT.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.—MATT. vi. 33.

IN the latter part of this chapter, our Saviour doth, in a long discourse, caution his disciples against an inordinate care about the things of this life, which he concludes with a strict charge to make religion their first and great concernment, and above all things to take care to secure to themselves the happiness of another life; "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," &c. In the handling of which words, I shall do these four things.

First, I shall explain what is here meant by the "kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

Secondly, What by seeking of these.

Thirdly, I shall lay down some necessary and plain directions, which if we observe, we cannot miscarry in this matter.

Fourthly, I shall set before you some of the most proper and powerful motives and encouragements to the minding of this great interest and concernment: among which, I shall particularly consider the argument or encouragement here used in the text, "and all these things shall be added unto you."

First, I shall explain to you what is here meant by "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

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I. What is meant by the "kingdom of God." And there are two famous acceptations of this phrase, and both of them very frequent in the New Testament. Sometimes it is used to signify the state of the gospel, or the Christian religion, which by the Jews was called the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of the Messias. (Mark i. 15.) "The kingdom of God is at hand;" that is, the state or dispensation of the gospel is now approaching, and ready to take place. (Luke xvii. 20.) The pharisees demanding of our Saviour, "when the kingdom of God should come?" that is, when the reign of the Messias should commence; he answers them, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation;" that is, not with any temporal pomp and splendour, so as to draw the eyes of people after it, as the Jews did vainly imagine; but "the kingdom of God, ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν, is among you," not *within you*, as our translation hath improperly rendered it; the kingdom of God (he tells them) is already come unto you, the Messias is among you, and ye are not aware of him. In the like sense this phrase is used, Matt. xxi. 43. "The kingdom of God (that is, the gospel) shall be taken from you, and given to a nation, bringing forth the fruits thereof." And so likewise the phrase of "the kingdom of heaven" is used, Matt. xi. 11. where, speaking of John the Baptist, our Saviour saith, that, "among them that were born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist;" that is, there was no greater person than he, under the Jewish dispensation; "and yet he that is least in the kingdom of heaven," that is, under the dispensation of the gospel, "is greater than he."

Now, though this sense of "the kingdom of God" be not wholly excluded in the text, yet there is

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another sense of this phrase very usual likewise in the Scripture, and which is more agreeable to the scope of our Saviour's argument and discourse; and so it signifies that future state of happiness and glory which good men shall be advanced to in another world, in opposition to this life and the enjoyments of it, which our Saviour had before forbidden his disciples to be so solicitous about. "Take ye no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" And then it follows in direct opposition to this inordinate and solicitous care about worldly things, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." That is, be not so solicitous about the conveniences and necessaries of this life, as about the happiness of the other, and the means to it. And this sense of this phrase of "the kingdom of God" is so very frequent in the New Testament, that I shall not need to give particular instances of it.

II. What is meant by righteousness; "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." Righteousness, in the strictest and most proper sense of the word, signifies the particular virtue of justice; and very frequently in the Old Testament it is used for charity to the poor, or alms-giving: (Psal. xxxvii. 25, 26.) "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread; he is ever merciful, and lendeth;" and, (Psal. cxii. 9.) "He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor, his righteousness endureth for ever." But righteousness, in its largest and most extended sense, comprehends all the virtues of a good man; and so it signifies here in the text, and in many other places of Scripture.

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So that "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," comprehends the whole business of religion—our last end, which is eternal life and happiness in another world, and the way and means to this end; which is righteousness, or that universal goodness which God requires of us, and whereof he himself is a pattern and example to us; for which reason it is called "his righteousness." And in this sense of our last end, and the way and means to it, the kingdom of heaven, and righteousness, are used in another place, even of this sermon of our Saviour's upon the mount: (Matt. v. 20.) "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven;" where righteousness is made the necessary means and condition of eternal life. I proceed, in the

Second place, to explain what is meant by seeking "first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." And this signifies the greatest intention of mind, and earnestness of endeavour about the business of religion, in order to our attaining of eternal happiness; such a seriousness and earnestness of endeavour as earthly-minded men use about the things of this world. "For after all these things (says our Saviour, immediately after the text), do the gentiles seek;" τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητεῖ, which words signify an intense care and vigorous endeavour; "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;" that is, be ye, who profess yourselves Christians, as intent upon the business of religion, and the salvation of your souls, as the heathen, who are in a great measure ignorant of God and another life, are about the things of this life.

And here are two things to be explained.

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I. What is here meant by seeking "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;" and,

II. What by seeking them in the first place.

For the first: A sincere and earnest seeking of "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," does imply in it these four things.

1. A fixed design and resolution as to the end; that we do not only propound to ourselves the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls, as our chief end, but that we be immoveably fixed upon it; and always have it in our aim and design; that here we set up our resolution, if it be possible, to be happy for ever; that we have this end always in our eye, and be firmly resolved to do all that we can towards attaining it.

Not that we are obliged always actually to think upon it; but to have it frequently in our minds, and habitually to intend and design it, so as to make it the scope of all our endeavours and actions, and that every thing we do be either directly and immediately in order to it, or some way or other subservient to this design, or however not inconsistent with it; like the term and end of a man's journey, towards which the traveller is continually tending, and hath it always habitually in his intention, though he doth not always think of it every step that he takes; and though he be not always directly advancing and moving towards it, yet he never knowingly goes out of the way. And though he bait and lodge by the way, and does many other things which do not directly set him forward, yet they are all subservient to his journey, or in prosecution of it; or at least no wilful deviations from it. Thus it should be with us, while we are sojourning in this world; our fixed aim and design

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should be to get to heaven, and thither we should be continually tending in our desires and endeavours.

And if this resolution be deeply rooted and fixed in our minds, it will govern all our actions, and keep them steady to their main end. Whereas, if we be uncertain and unresolved upon our great end, and be divided between the happiness of the next life, and the present enjoyments of this, we shall be fickle and unsteady in all our motions. He that hath two ends, can pursue neither vigorously, but while he is moving towards the one, he leans and inclines to the other; and, like a needle between two loadstones, is always in a doubtful and trembling condition; inclines to both, but is constant to neither: and this is the meaning of that aphorism of St. James, "the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." He that is unresolved as to his main end hath two minds, and can prosecute nothing vigorously: but if our mind be once fixed and resolved, that will determine and govern all our motions, and inspire us with diligence, and zeal, and perseverance, in the prosecution of our end.

2. Seeking "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," implies incessant care and diligence as to the means; that we make religion our business, and exercise ourselves in the duties of it, both in public and private, at proper times and seasons, with the same seriousness and application of mind as men do in their callings and professions, for the gaining of wealth and preferment; especially on the Lord's-day, which God hath taken to himself, and set apart for the duties of his worship and service. Not that we are excused from minding religion at other times; but that those, who are pressed and straitened by the necessary cares of this life, may

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be sure to mind it then, and may have no colour of excuse for the neglect of it at that time, which God hath allotted for that very purpose, and which it is unlawful to employ about our worldly affairs. God expects that we should serve him at other times, that we should live in an habitual sense of him, and (as Solomon expresseth it, Prov. xxiii. 17.) "Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long;" so as to be careful not to offend or transgress in any thing, and so as to redeem all opportunities for the exercise of piety and devotion; but this day he peremptorily challengeth to himself, and expects we should employ it in his service, and dedicate it to religion, to the contemplation of God and heavenly things, and the care of our immortal souls, with the same seriousness and diligence as we do, upon other days, "labour for the bread that perisheth;" and the less leisure we have upon other days for this purpose, the more entirely should we devote and consecrate this day to the purposes and duties of religion.

Not but that our whole life, and all the actions of it, should be under the government of religion, and directed by the laws and rules of it; and it should be our continual care and endeavour to please God in all things; and we should take as much pains, and be as heartily concerned to be good men, as the men of the world are to grow rich and great in this world; nay, so much more, by how much it is a better and nobler design to improve in grace and virtue, than to prosper and thrive in our temporal estate; and we do not in good earnest "seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness," if this be not our great study and endeavour, to subdue our lusts and govern our passions; and, in a word, to reform whatever is amiss in the inward frame and

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temper of our minds, and in our outward conversation. And, indeed, nothing does require greater diligence, and attention, and care, than for a man to become truly and thoroughly good, to be meek, and humble, and patient, and contented, and resigned to the will of God in every condition; to be peaceable, and charitable, and placable, and ready to forgive: these are great and difficult things, and whatever we think, not the work of a wish, or the effect of a sudden resolution before the receiving of the holy sacrament; no, nor the fruit of frequent and fervent prayer, without the hearty concurrence of our own care and endeavour to render our lives such, as we pray God by his grace to assist and enable us to be.

3. Seeking "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," does further imply zeal and earnestness in the pursuit of this design; and this is a degree above diligence; for zeal is an ardour and fervency of mind in the prosecution of a thing for which we are greatly concerned, and which we vehemently desire to obtain; it is the hottest and most intense degree of our affection towards any thing of our desire and love, mixed with anger at every thing that stands in our way, and hinders us from obtaining what we seek after; such a heat as ambition doth commonly inspire men withal, in the pursuit of power and preferment. Such ought to be the temper of our minds, and the edge of our spirits, in seeking "the kingdom of God," as does usually possess men in seeking the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. We must remember, that it is a kingdom which we seek for, and aspire after; not like the unstable and tottering kingdoms of this

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world, but "a kingdom which cannot be shaken," as the apostle calls it.

So that the greatness of the design, and the excellency of what we seek after, will justify and warrant the highest degree of a discreet zeal and fervour in the prosecution of it; and therefore no wonder that the Scripture, in this matter, useth words that import the greatest vehemency and earnestness, bidding us to "strive to enter in at the strait gate," to labour and watch, to run, and wrestle, and fight, and, in a word, to "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure."

Lastly, Seeking "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," does imply patience and perseverance in our endeavours after them, and that we never cease our pursuit of them until we have obtained them; and this, notwithstanding all the difficulties and discouragements, the opposition and persecution, that we meet with "for righteousness' sake:" for this we must expect and reckon upon beforehand, to encounter many difficulties and find many discouragements in the ways of religion; for "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life," as our Lord himself hath told us: nay, we must count to be grievously "persecuted for righteousness' sake," and, if God see it good for us, to pass through many tribulations before we shall "enter into the kingdom of God;" and therefore we had need to be armed with a great deal of patience, and a very firm and obstinate resolution, to enable us to bear up, and to hold out against all these; for this is a necessary qualification for our seeking "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." So our Lord hath told us, (Matth. x. 22.)

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" he that endureth to the end shall be saved;" if we hope to receive the " crown of life," we must " be faithful to the death." (Rev. ii. 10.) And to the same purpose, St. Paul declares, (Rom. ii. 7.) that they only shall be made partakers of eternal life, " who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality."

You see what is meant by " seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; that is, let this be your main and principal design, so as to take place of all others in your esteem and affections, in your aim and endeavour; in comparison of this, mind nothing else, not the comforts and conveniences, no, not the necessaries of life, " what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed." These, you see, our Saviour instanceth in before the text, as not to be regarded and taken care of, when they come in competition with " the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." And our Saviour tells us elsewhere, that not only none of the comforts and necessaries of life are to be valued against him and his religion, but that even temporal life itself, as dear as it is to us, is to be parted withal, and given up, rather than to quit the profession of his truth and religion. (Matth. x. 37, 38.) " He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." He instanceth in the nearest relations, those towards whom we have the most tender and relenting affections, and yet he tells us, that the consideration of his truth and religion ought to take place of these, nay, even of life itself; for so it follows, and " he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." St. Luke expresseth it more strongly and

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vehemently; (Luke xiv. 26.) "If any man come to me (that is, take upon him the profession of my religion) and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." When these come in competition with our religion, and the great interest of our eternal salvation, we are to regard and value them no more than if they were the objects of our hatred; but to set aside all consideration of affection to them, so far as it would tempt us from constancy in our religion, and the care of our souls.

So that when our Saviour bids us "first to seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," his meaning is, that religion, and the concernments of our souls, and the eternal happiness of them in another world, should be our first and chief care; and that all other things should be made subordinate and subservient to this great design, and be no farther minded by us than they really are so: for that which is our great end, will subdue all other things, and bring them into subjection to it, and will reject them, and throw them aside, if they be inconsistent with it. If heaven be our utmost aim, and in order to that, it be our great study and endeavour to be righteous and holy, this resolution and design, sincerely entertained, will overrule all other considerations, and make all the things of this world to stoop and give way to that which is our chief end, the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls. And thus have I done with the second thing I proposed; namely, what is meant by "seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;" and what by "seeking them first."

I proceed, in the third place, to lay down some

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plain rules for our direction and furtherance "in seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;" that is, in the great business of religion.

First, Let us always live under a lively and powerful sense of another world: that we are placed here in this world but for a little while, and that wholly in order to our preparation for a better and happier life. Let this thought be often in your minds:—that eternity is the most considerable duration, and the next world the place of our everlasting abode, where we must dwell and continue for ever; and, therefore, our present state is but of little moment and consideration to us, but only in order to our future and everlasting condition. We may please ourselves here, for a little while, with toys and trifles, with dreams and shadows of pleasure and happiness, and may be exercised with some troubles and afflictions for a short space, "for a moment," as the apostle calls it; "our light afflictions, which are but for a moment;" and so, indeed, it is, compared with all eternity: but the substantial and durable happiness or misery remain for men in the other world, and will certainly be their portion, according as they have demeaned themselves in this world.

Now, the serious consideration of this cannot fail to put us upon vigorous preparations for another world, and to make us wholly intent upon our eternal concernments, and to resolve, whatever becomes of us in this world, to take effectual care that we may be happy for ever. He that firmly believes the immortality of his soul, and a life after death, which will never have an end, must needs take into consideration his whole duration, and bend all his care and thoughts how he may avoid the greatest and most

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lasting misery, and secure to himself an immortality of bliss and happiness.

Secondly, Let us always be under a conviction of the absolute and indispensable necessity of holiness and righteousness, as the only way and means whereby the kingdom of God is to be attained, and that holiness and happiness are not to be separated, the one being a necessary condition and qualification for the other; and, consequently, that it is the vainest thing in the world for any man to hope to enter into the kingdom of God, without endeavouring after his righteousness; there is so strong a connexion between them, that a man may as reasonably expect to be well and at ease without health, as to be happy without holiness; for this makes us like to God, and our likeness and conformity to God, is that alone which can make us capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of God. We must be partakers of the Divine nature, in order to our participation of the Divine blessedness. And the consideration of this will effectually engage us to seek the righteousness of God, without which we shall never enter into his kingdom; and to follow holiness, "without which no man shall see the Lord."

Thirdly, Let us always remember that righteousness is of a great extent, and comprehends in it all goodness; it takes in all the duties of religion, and the practice of all of them; it is a complication of all graces and virtues, of all the parts and ingredients, of all the duties and offices of a good man. To denominate a man righteous, all causes must concur; all the essential principles and parts of religion and goodness must meet together; knowledge and practice, faith and good works, right opinions and real virtues, an orthodox profession and a holy

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life, abstaining from sin and doing of righteousness, purity of heart and unspotted manners, godliness and honesty, the bridling of our tongue and the government of our passions, "and, above all things, charity, which is the bond of perfection."

For righteousness is our conformity to the law of God, as unrighteousness and sin is the transgression of it. Now this, if it be real and sincere, will be uniform and universal, equally respecting all the laws of God, and every part of our known duty, and will not content itself with an especial regard to one or two precepts of the law, though never so considerable, and then allow itself in the neglect and violation of the rest; no, nor with the observation of the duties of one table of the law, if it overlook the other; no, nor with obedience to all the commandments of God, one only excepted. St. James hath put this very case, and determined it, that "he that shall keep the whole law, save only that he offend in one point, is guilty of all;" that is, he is not sincere in his obedience to the rest; and therefore, if we seek the righteousness of God, our righteousness must be universal; as he that hath called us is holy, so must we be holy in all manner of conversation, in the tenor of our actions, and the whole course of our lives: and any one reigning sin and vice, any gross and notorious defect in the virtues of a good life, will spoil all our righteousness, and will effectually shut us out of the kingdom of heaven.

Fourthly, Let us wisely subordinate the several parts and duties of religion to one another, according to the intrinsical worth and value of them, that so we may mind every part of religion in its due place, and according to the true nature and importance of it. Knowledge and faith are in order to

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practice, and a good life; and signify nothing unless they produce that; the means of religion, such as prayer and fasting, diligent reading and hearing the word of God, reverent and devout receiving of the blessed sacrament, are of less account and value than that which is the end of all these, which is to make us inwardly and really good, and fruitful in all the works of righteousness, which, by Jesus Christ, are to the praise and glory of God. And therefore, the means of religion, which I have mentioned, are to be regarded and used by us in order to the attaining of these ends, without which they are mere formality and hypocrisy; and, instead of finding acceptance with God, they are an abomination to him, and his soul hates them.

And so, likewise, the circumstances of religion are less considerable than the substantial means and instruments of it. And, therefore, all rites and ceremonies are, in religion, of less consideration than the substance of God's worship, and ought always to be subordinate to it. In like manner the moral duties of religion, comprehended under the two great commandments, of the love of God and our neighbour, because they are of eternal and indispensable obligation, are to be preferred to matters of mere positive institution; and where they cannot stand together, that which is positive ought to be set aside, and to give way, for the present, to that which is moral and good in its own nature, and not only because it is commanded and enjoined; for, in this case, God hath expressly declared that he "will have mercy and not sacrifice." Upon which ground our Saviour declares, that the law of the sabbath ought to give place to works of mercy. Upon the same account peace and charity are to be valued

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above matters of nicety and scruple, of doubtful dispute and controversy; because the former are unquestionably good, the latter doubtfully and uncertainly so.

All these things ought to be considered, and are of great moment to make a man sincerely and wisely religious. For men may keep a great stir about some parts of religion, and be very careful and diligent, zealous and earnest about the means and instruments of religion, and in the exercises of piety and devotion, and yet be destitute of the power and life of it, and fall short of that inward, and real, and substantial righteousness, which alone can qualify us for the kingdom of God.

The fifth and last direction I would give is this—That we have a particular regard to the great duty of charity, or alms-giving, this being very frequently in Scripture called righteousness, as being an eminent part of religion, and a great evidence of the truth and sincerity of our piety. And this our Saviour particularly directs to, as the way to the kingdom of God. (Luke xii. 33.) After this general exhortation to seek the kingdom of God, he instanceth in charity, as the direct way to it: "Give alms, provide for yourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens which faileth not." And elsewhere our Saviour speaks of this grace and virtue, as that which, above all others, will make way for our admission into heaven: (Luke xvi. 9.) "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you (or ye may be received) into everlasting habitations." And St. Paul calls it, "laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation;" or (as the word may better be rendered in this place) "a good

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treasure against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life." (1 Tim. vi. 19.) St. James speaks of it as a main and most essential part of religion, and the great evidence of a true and sincere piety. (Jam. i. 27.) "Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." Finally, our Lord instanceth in this, as the very thing which will admit us into, or shut us out of, heaven; by the performance whereof we shall be absolved, and for the neglect whereof we shall be condemned in the judgment of the great day. (Matth. xxv.) So that this part of righteousness or religion, ought, in a more especial manner, to be regarded by us, because, upon the performance or neglect of this duty, our eternal happiness doth so much depend.

The fourth and last thing only remains to be spoken to; which is, to set before you the most proper and powerful motives and encouragements to the minding of this great interest and concernment. But this will be the subject of another discourse.

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SERMON XCIV.

RELIGION, OUR FIRST AND GREAT CONCERNMENT.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.—MATT. vi. 33.

THESE words, which I began to discourse upon the last day, are a strict charge and command to all Christians, to mind the business of religion in the first place, and to take all imaginable care to secure the happiness of another life; "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." In the handling of which argument,

First, I explained what is meant by "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

Secondly, I shewed what is meant by seeking these, and what by seeking them first.

Thirdly, I laid down some rules for our direction and furtherance in this great business.

I shall now proceed to represent to you, in the

Fourth and last place, some of the most proper and powerful arguments and encouragements, to engage us to the minding of this great interest and concernment; amongst which I shall, in the last place, particularly consider the encouragement here given in the text, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

First, My first argument shall be from the worth and excellency of the things we seek, "the kingdom

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of God and his righteousness," which are certainly the greatest and best things we can seek. "The kingdom of God" is the eternal salvation of our souls, everlasting life and happiness in another world, which, to animate our endeavours, and to tempt our ambition the more, are set forth to us under the notion of a kingdom. And what will not men do to obtain that? what pains will they not take? what hazards will they not run? what difficulties will they not grapple with and break through, if they can, to come to a kingdom? which, when they have obtained, they are exposed to as many, and commonly to more cares and fears, to greater difficulties and dangers in the keeping, than they were for the getting of it: and yet all this men will do for a corruptible crown, for one of the petty kingdoms and principalities of this world, which are continually tottering and ready to be overturned by open violence, or to be undermined by secret treachery. But "the kingdom" which I am speaking of, and persuading you and myself to seek after, is not like the kingdoms of men, and of this world; it is called "the kingdom of God," to signify to us the excellency and stability of it; as much beyond any of the kingdoms of this world, as the heavens are high above the earth, and as God is greater than man; "a kingdom which cannot be shaken, a crown which fadeth not away," a sceptre which cannot be wrested from us.

But to quit the metaphor, and speak to the thing: "The kingdom of God" imports the eternal salvation of our souls; I say of our souls, which, both in respect of the dignity of their nature and their immortal duration, are infinitely more valuable than any of the perishing things of this world, and ought

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to be much dearer to us. Other things are without us, they neither constitute our being, nor are essential to our happiness; but our souls are ourselves, and the loss of them is our utter ruin and destruction. So that nothing is to be regarded by us with equal care and concernment as the salvation of our immortal souls; that is, that we may be rescued from eternal misery, and everlastingly happy in another world. And can we be at too much cost and pains upon such a design, to escape so dismal a condition, so dreadful a ruin, as that of body and soul to all eternity? Can any man be concerned enough to bring about so great a good to himself? or, can he purchase it too dear, whatever he give or part with for it? a good so desirable and so durable as our being happy for ever. When we purchase the things of this world, the riches and honours of it, at the expense of so much time, and care, and trouble, we pay dear for trifles and fancies; but eternal happiness is a jewel of so inestimable a price, that a wise merchant will have it at any rate, and sell all that he hath to purchase it.

Of such value is "the kingdom of God;" and next to it is righteousness, which is the only way and means whereby this kingdom is to be attained, and therefore to be sought by us with the greatest diligence and earnestness: for that which is the only means to a great and desirable end, and which alone can make us capable of that end, and which in truth is a degree of it, is valuable next to the end, and almost equally with it; and such is righteousness in respect of "the kingdom of God;" it is the only means to it, it is that alone which qualifies us, and makes us capable of happiness; nay, it is an essential ingredient into it, and that which does in a

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great measure constitute the happiness of heaven; for that temper of mind, that conformity and likeness to God, which holiness and righteousness brings us to, is the true foundation of our happiness, and, according to the best apprehensions we have now of it, is the very formal cause and essence of our blessedness. So St. John tells us: (1 John iii. 2.) "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him;" that is, we do not now distinctly understand wherein the happiness of the next life consists, we are not able to frame a clear and perfect idea of it; but this we know, in general, that it consists in our likeness to God, in a conformity to the moral perfections of the Divine nature, which are expressed by the name of purity and holiness; and therefore every one that hopes for the happiness of heaven must endeavour after holiness: "Every man that hath this hope in him must purify himself, even as he is pure."

So that the things which I am pressing you to seek after are most effectually recommended, by telling you what they are; "the kingdom of God" is eternal life and happiness, and "his righteousness" is universal holiness and goodness, without which no man is qualified for this blessed state. Now if there be any thing better than goodness, any thing more desirable than a happiness which hath no bounds, nor no end; do not mind them, nor look after them; but if there be not, then certainly these are worthy of the care and endeavour of our whole life.

Secondly, Another consideration that should very much excite and quicken our endeavour and diligence, in seeking these things, is the difficulty of

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obtaining them. This, I confess, is no encouragement, but it is a very good motive and argument to whet our industry in seeking these things, when we plainly see that they are not to be had upon other terms. And this consideration our Saviour useth to quicken us to strive and to contend earnestly for eternal life: (Matt. vii. 14.) "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it." And, (Luke xiii. 24.) "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

Seeking here, in opposition to striving, is a faint and weak endeavour, which will not carry us through this narrow and difficult passage; and this is the reason why many miscarry, who made some attempts towards heaven; but they do not strive, they do not put forth any vigorous endeavours to get thither.

Now the difficulty of attaining eternal happiness ariseth from the difficulty of the way and means to it; and it is therefore hard to attain "the kingdom of God," because it is hard to attain "his righteousness." As desirable as it is, it must be acknowledged very difficult for a man to raise himself to that temper and disposition of mind, so to subdue his lusts, and govern his passions, to bridle his tongue, and order all the actions of his life, as is necessary to qualify him for happiness, and to make him fit to be admitted into "the kingdom of God."

And this difficulty is chiefly in ourselves, but greatly increased by temptation and opposition from without. Chiefly, I say, in ourselves, from the strong bias of our evil and corrupt inclinations, and the strong power of vicious habits and customs,

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which, when they are grown inveterate, do tyrannize over us, and make us perfect slaves, and lead us captive at their pleasure; so that our nature must be quite changed, and, as the apostle expresseth it, we must be "renewed in the spirit of our minds," our souls must be new moulded and fashioned, we must be, as it were, created and born again, before we can "enter into the kingdom of God." In this our Saviour is positive and peremptory: (John iii. 3.) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This difficulty, indeed, is greatest at first, but it is considerable afterwards, until a thorough change be made, and new inclinations planted in us, and the contrary habits of grace and virtue be superinduced.

And that which increaseth the difficulty is outward temptation and opposition from the world and the devil; which to withstand and resist, requires great courage and resolution, great watchfulness and guard over ourselves. But yet, for our comfort, these difficulties are not insuperable to that grace and assistance which God is always ready to afford to us upon so good an occasion, and to so good a purpose; "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." And this, I am sure, is matter of great encouragement to us, that, though the difficulty of working out our salvation be great, yet, if we do in good earnest set about it, God is ready to assist and second our sincere endeavours, "to work in us both to will and to do of his own goodness," and so to prevent us with his gracious favour, and to further us with his continual aid, that finally by his mercy we may obtain eternal life.

Thirdly, Another powerful argument to care and

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diligence, is, the fatal danger of miscarriage in a matter of so great concernment. We may do many things in religion, and take some pains to get to heaven, and yet fall short of it. The rich young man in the gospel, our Saviour tells us, was "not far from the kingdom of God;" and he broke with our Saviour only upon one point—he was too much addicted to the world, and loath to part with his great possessions, and distribute them in charity to the poor; and thereupon he left our Saviour, and, for any thing we can find, never returned to him again.

If the world govern and bear sway in our hearts, if we mind earthly things first, and make these our chief care and design, the kingdom of God and his righteousness shall not be added unto us; if we will not mind them in the first place, they are too good to be accessaries.

And if upon any one point we miscarry, either out of love to the world, or affection to any other lust or vice that we are loath to part withal, our miscarriage is fatal, and the ruin which we bring upon ourselves irreparable; for the soul once lost, is lost for ever. If we have neglected the opportunity of working out our own salvation, while we are in this world, it will never return into our power again; death will shut the door against us, and we shall never see the kingdom of God.

Fourthly, It is a mighty encouragement to us to consider, that, if we sincerely seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, there is not only a fair probability of obtaining them, but all the security we can desire. Men may be in good earnest for the things of this world, may love them with all their hearts and souls (as we see too many do) and seek them with all their might and strength; and yet, after

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all their endeavours, may be shamefully frustrated and disappointed of their end. There are many examples of this kind daily before our eyes, and yet men are not discouraged from seeking these things. A fair probability, nay, almost a possibility of attaining them, is enough to a worldly-minded man to drudge and toil for them. Why, the same affection, the same zeal, the same unwearied endeavour to please God, and to save our souls, would infallibly bring us to heaven. It was a sad but true saying of Cardinal Wolsey, when he was leaving the world, "Had I been but as careful to please God, as I have been to serve my prince, he would not have forsaken me now in the time of my grey hairs."

Nay, it is to be hoped, that less diligence and care about the concernments of our souls and another life, than many men use about the things of this life, will secure our eternal happiness, or else it is to be feared that but very few would be saved: and who would not place his industry, and endeavour upon a design in which he is sure not to miscarry, if he do but heartily and in good earnest pursue it? especially when it will be of infinite greater advantage to him, than any design he can propound to himself for this world. If a man may be certainly happy for ever, upon the same or easier terms, than he can ordinarily compass any of those little designs which men propose to themselves in this world, who would not seek that which is most worthy the having, and which he is surest to maintain?

Fifthly and lastly, The encouragement here in the text is not inconsiderable; that if we "seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto us." This certainly is a very tempting consideration; for who would not be

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glad to reconcile the enjoyment of this world with the hopes of heaven and eternal happiness? But men do not generally like our Saviour's method—they would seek the things of this world in the first place, and get to heaven at last; they would be content to seek the one, and have the other cast in and conferred upon them without their seeking. But this will not be granted, this way will not do. And yet our Saviour has gone as far as one would think could in reason be desired; he hath promised, that if we will make religion, and the salvation of our souls, our first and chief care, that "all these things shall be added unto us." So that the design of going to heaven, and being happy for ever, is no ways inconsistent with a competent portion of the things of this life. Godliness (the apostle tells us) "hath the promise of this life, and of that which is to come." The business of religion, the practice of a holy and virtuous life, is no hinderance to a man's thriving in his temporal estate: nay, in many respects, it is apt to promote and advance it; by engaging us to diligence in our calling, and by deriving the blessing of God upon our honest and lawful endeavours; by obliging us to the strict and constant practice of truth, and justice, and fidelity, in all our dealings and commerce, which are the best way to establish a clear and solid reputation, and good esteem among men, which is an unspeakable advantage in business, and, at the long run, one of the best and most lasting instruments of prosperity and success.

Besides that, religion frees a man from those passions and vices which do naturally tend to dissipate and ruin men's estates; as intemperance and lewdness, which are every way chargeable vices, and do not only take men off from business, and render them

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unfit for it; but waste their estates, and bring many other inconveniences upon their persons and families. Religion makes men meek and peaceable, and inoffensive in word and deed, which is a great security against chargeable suits and contentions, and all sorts of injuries and affronts from others. Among all the beatitudes of our Saviour, he only promiseth temporal happiness to meekness: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." They who provoke and offend nobody, are likely to be least disturbed and disquieted by others in their possessions and enjoyments; "Who will harm you, (saith the apostle, 1 Peter iii. 13.) if ye be followers of that which is good?" Some may be so perverse as to persecute a man for his goodness; but it rarely happens; most men have not only a kindness, but a veneration for true goodness.

By all these ways religion naturally tends to the temporal prosperity of men, and the promoting of their welfare and happiness even in this world; besides that, the providence of God is very peculiarly concerned for good men, and a special blessing attends them in all their undertakings. So that, excepting the case of persecution (which God will particularly consider and reward in another world), the religious and good man, who sincerely "seeks the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," stands as fair, and is upon as good terms for all the lawful enjoyments of this world, as he that makes it his only design to be rich and great in this world; nay, as to the necessaries of this life, and a competency of outward things, he hath a much greater and better security from the providence and promise of God, than the men of the world have by all their care and pains.

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Besides that, he hath this considerable advantage, by minding these things only as accessaries, that, if he miss of them, he hath something better to support him in the want of them; being secure of a happiness which this world can neither give nor take from him. But now the worldly man, if he be defeated in his designs, is of all men most miserable, because he hath nothing else to comfort him, nothing else to trust to; he fails of his hopes as to this world, and hath done what in him lies to make his case desperate as to the other.

Upon all these considerations and encouragements, you see how reasonable it is that we should make religion, and the concernment of another life, our great care and business. And yet, how are these neglected by the greatest part of mankind! and by the best of us (God knows) not minded as they ought, and as they deserve! What can we say for ourselves in excuse of so intolerable a folly? There are two or three things which men commonly pretend, if not in justification, yet in mitigation and excuse, of this great neglect.

First, They pretend great difficulties and discouragements in the ways of religion. This I have already acknowledged to be true, so far as to awaken our care, and to whet our industry; but by no means to make us despond and give over all care of so great a concernment, because of the difficulties it is attended withal. Men who have no mind to a thing, are apt to imagine great difficulties in the attaining of it, and to magnify them in their fancies beyond reason. As the people of Israel, when they were to enter into Canaan (which was the type of the kingdom of heaven), represented the inhabitants of the land, whom they were to conquer, more terrible than

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in truth they were; reporting to one another, that the land was full of giants, and sons of Anak, men of prodigious stature, and cities walled up to heaven. And this the wise man observes to be the perpetual excuse of the slothful; when they have no mind to a thing, they say "there is a lion in the way;" that is, they fancy to themselves dangers and terrors which are not. Thus men who are averse from religion, and have no mind to be at the trouble and pains to get to heaven, are apt to complain of the monstrous and insuperable difficulties of religion, and how hard it is for a man to mortify his lusts, and subdue his appetites, and govern his passions, and to do all those things which are necessary to bring him to heaven. Well! it is acknowledged to be difficult, and is it not so to get an estate, and to rise to any thing in this world? The true pains which men take about these things, shew that they are difficult; only when men have a mind to a thing, and their heart is set upon it, they do not stand to complain of the difficulty, but buckle to it, and grapple with it.

Is religion difficult? And what is not so, that is good for any thing? Is not the law a difficult and crabbed study? Does it not require great labour, and perpetual drudging, to excel in any kind of knowledge, to be master of any art or profession? In a word, is there any thing in the world worthy the having, that is to be gotten without pains? And is eternal life and glory the only slight and inconsiderable thing that is not worth our care and industry? Is it fit that so great a good should be exposed to the faint and idle wishes, to the cheap and lazy endeavours of slothful men? For, what reason, nay, with what conscience, can he bid less for heaven and eternal life,

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than men are contented to give for the things of this world; things of no value in comparison, not worthy the toiling for, not sure to be attained by all our endeavours; things which perish in the using, and which, when we have them, we are liable to be deprived of by a thousand accidents? One fit of a fever may shatter our understandings, and confound all our knowledge, and turn us into fools and idiots; an inundation or a fire may sweep away and devour our estates; a succession of calamities may, in a few hours, make the richest and greatest man as poor as Job, and set him upon a dunghill.

But be the difficulty what it will of attaining "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," they are to be sought at any rate; because they are absolutely necessary, and we miserable and undone if we have them not. And therefore, not to dissemble in the matter, the difficulties of religion are considerable; but then they are much greater at first, and will every day abate and grow less, and the work by degrees will become easy, and turn into pleasure and delight: a pleasure so great, as none knows but he that hath it; and he that hath it, would not exchange it for all the sensual pleasures and enjoyments of this world.

Secondly, Others pretend want of time for the minding of so great a work. And it is very true, that all persons have not equal leisure for this purpose; some are much more straitened than others, and more taken up with the necessary cares of this life; but God hath put no man upon this hard necessity, that for want of time he shall be forced to neglect his body and his health, his family and estate, to save his soul. And yet, if any man were brought to this distress, it were well worth his while

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to secure his eternal salvation, though it were with the neglect and loss of all other things. But those who are most straitened for time, have so much as is absolutely necessary; for there is a considerable part of religion which does not require time, but resolution and care: not to commit sin, not to break the laws of God, not to be intemperate, "to make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof," does not spend time, but saves it for better purposes; so that every man hath time not to do that which he ought not to do: and for the positive part of religion, whether it consists in the exercise of our minds, or in the external acts of religion, no man is so distressed, but he hath time to think of heaven and eternity; time to love God, to esteem him, and delight in him above all things. And this a man may do very frequently, and very acceptably, while he is labouring and travailing about his worldly affairs, while his hand is upon the plough his heart may be with God; and while he converseth here upon earth, his thoughts and affections may be in heaven. Every man hath time to pray to God every day, for his mercy and forgiveness, for his grace and assistance, for his preservation and support, and to thank him heartily for all his blessings and benefits. And a little time seriously employed in this kind, would have the same acceptance with God, as the more solemn and longer devotions of those who have more leisure and opportunities for them. To be sure, we have all of us time to serve God upon his own day, and to employ it wholly in the exercises of piety, and the care and consideration of our souls.

But this, when all is said, is the case but of a very few; most of us have no colour for this com-

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plaint; *Non inopes temporis, sed prodigi sumus* (as Seneca says), "We are not poor, but prodigal of our time, and lavish it away profusely upon folly and vanity." Our vices and lusts, our pleasures and diversions, consume and divert those precious hours, which should be employed to these better purposes; nay, many times time oppresseth us, and is a burden to us, and lies upon our hands, and we know not how to get rid of it; and yet we choose rather to let it run waste, than to bestow it upon religion, and the care of our souls; insomuch, that I fear this will be the condition of many, that when they were at a loss what to do with their time, and knew not how to spend it, they would not lay it out upon that which was best and most necessary; for this surely is the very best use that can be made of time, to prepare and provide for eternity.

Thirdly, Others pretend it will be time enough to mind these things hereafter. But this (as bad excuses seldom hang together, and agree with one another) directly contradicts the former pretence, which supposeth so much time necessary, and more than many have to spare; and yet now they would make us believe that a very little time will suffice for this work, and that it may be done at any time, even just when we are going out of this world. But this, of all other, is the strangest interpretation of seeking "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" first, to put it off to the very last. This surely is a greater error on the other hand, to think that the business of religion is so quickly to be dispatched, and that the great work of our lives can be crowded into so narrow a corner of it, that the time of sickness and old age, nay, the hour of death, well employed to this purpose, will be suf-

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ficient. Alas! what can we then do that is good for any thing? that can in reason be thought either acceptable to God, or available for ourselves? When we have not sense and understanding enough to dispose of our temporal concernments, and to make our wills, do we think we shall be fit to repent of the sins and miscarriages of our whole lives, and to make our peace with God? Every man must not expect to have Saul's fortune, who, when he was wearied with seeking his father's asses, met with a kingdom. We must not think, when we are tired with pursuing the follies and vanities of this world, to retire into heaven, and to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; in the kingdom of heaven.

Our Saviour hath taken care to caution us against this desperate folly, by a parable to this very purpose, of the foolish virgins; who, having trifled away their time till the bridegroom was coming, and neglected to get oil into their lamps (by which we are to understand all those good preparations and dispositions which are necessary to qualify us for the kingdom of God); I say, having neglected their opportunity of getting this oil, while they were looking after it too late, the door was shut against them; they thought to have repaired all at last, by borrowing of others, and supplying themselves that way.

And thus many deceive themselves, hoping to be supplied out of another store, when they have no grace and goodness of their own; out of the treasure of the church, from the redundant merit of the saints, and their works of supererogation; of which some believe (I know not for what reason) that there is a great stock which the pope may

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dispose of, to supply those who have taken no care to get oil into their lamps. But I know not for what reason works of supererogation are supposed; the wise virgins knew not of any merit they had to spare; it was the foolish virgins only that entertained this senseless conceit. I am sure the parable insinuates the quite contrary; that the best and holiest persons (which are represented by the wise virgins) have nothing to spare for the supply of others, who have been careless of their souls; "the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out; but the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." It seems they had no works of supererogation that they knew of; but they do ironically send them to a market that was set up somewhere, and where these things were pretended to be sold: but how they sped the conclusion of the parable tells us, that, whilst they were running about in great haste to make this purchase of the merits and good works of others, the bridegroom came, and the wise virgins that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the rest were shut out.

And there are those likewise among ourselves, who, having been careless to qualify themselves for the kingdom of God, hope to be supplied out of the infinite treasure of Christ's merits: but this also is a vain hope. For though there be merit enough in the death and sufferings of Christ to save all mankind, yet no man can lay claim thereto who does not perform the conditions of the gospel.

Others think, by sending for the minister, when the physician hath given them over, to receive in a

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few hours such advice and direction, as will do their business as effectually as if they had minded religion all their lives long; and that a few devout prayers said over them, when they are just embarking for another world, will, like a magic wind, immediately waft them over into the regions of bliss and immortality.

But let us not deceive ourselves; we may defer the business so long, till we shall get nothing by our late application to God, and crying to him, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," but that severe answer, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I know not whence ye are." If we would not have this our doom, let us "first seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," that so, "having our fruit unto holiness, our end may be everlasting life."

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SERMON XCV.

THE WISDOM OF RELIGION.

I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.—PSAL. CXIX. 96.

THIS psalm seems to have a great deal more of poetical number and skill in it, than at this distance from the time and age in which it was written, we can easily understand; the main scope and design of it is very plain and obvious; namely, to magnify the law of God, and the observation of its precepts, as that wherein true religion doth mainly consist. And, indeed, if we attentively read and consider it, every part of this psalm does with great variety of expression, and yet very little difference of the sense, descant upon the same ground; viz. the excellency and perfection of the law of God. And the words of the text seem to be as full and comprehensive of the sense and design of the whole psalm, as any one sentence in it; "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad."

These words are variously rendered and understood by interpreters, who yet in this variety do very much conspire and agree in the same sense. The Chaldee paraphrase renders the words thus: "I have seen an end of all things, about which I have employed my care; but thy commandment is very large." The Syriac version thus: "I have seen an end of all regions and countries (that is, I have found the compass of this habitable world to be

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finite and limited); but thy commandment is of a vast extent." Others explain it thus: "I have seen an end of all perfection;" that is, of all the things of this world, which men value and esteem at so high a rate; of all worldly wisdom and knowledge, of wealth, and honour, and greatness, which do all perish and pass away; "but thy law is eternal, and still abideth the same;" or, as the Scripture elsewhere expresseth it, "the word of the Lord endureth for ever.

Thy law; that is, the rule of our duty natural and revealed; or, in a word, religion, which consists in the knowledge and practice of the laws of God, is of greater perfection than all other things which are so highly valued in this world; for the perfection of it is infinite, and of a vast influence and extent; it reacheth to the whole man, to the happiness of body and soul; to our whole duration, both in this world and the next; of this life, and of that which is to come. And this will clearly appear, if we consider the reasonableness and the wisdom of religion, which consists in the knowledge of God, and the keeping of his laws.

First, The reasonableness of religion, which is able to give a very good account of itself, because it settles the mind of man upon a firm basis, and keeps it from rolling in perpetual uncertainty; whereas atheism and infidelity wants a stable foundation; it centres no where but in the denial of God and religion, and yet substitutes no principle, no tenable and constituent scheme of things, in the place of them; its whole business is to unravel all things, to unsettle the mind of man, and to shake all the common notions and received principles of mankind; it bends its whole force to pull down and

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to destroy, but lays no foundation to build any thing upon in the stead of that which it pulls down.

It runs upon that great absurdity which Aristotle (who was always thought a great master of reason) does every where decry, as a principle unworthy of a philosopher; namely, a progress of causes *in infinitum*, and without end; that this was the cause of that, and a third thing of that, and so on without end, which amounts to just nothing; and finally resolves an infinite number of effects into no first cause; than which nothing can be more unskilful and bungling, and less worthy of a philosopher. But this I do not intend at present to insist upon, having treated largely on the same subject upon another* occasion. I shall therefore proceed, in the

Second place, to consider the wisdom of religion. "The fear of the Lord is wisdom," so saith the psalmist; it is true wisdom indeed, it is the beginning of wisdom, *caput sapientiæ*, the top and perfection of all wisdom. Here true wisdom begins, and upon this foundation it is raised and carried on to perfection; and I shall, in my following discourse, endeavour to make out these two things:

First, That true wisdom begins and is founded in religion, in the fear of God, and in the keeping of his commandments.

Secondly, That this is the perfection of wisdom; there is no wisdom without this, nor beyond it.

First, True wisdom begins and is founded in religion, and the fear of God, and regard to his laws. This is the first principle of wisdom, and the foundation upon which the whole design of our happiness is to be built. This is, in the first place, to be sup-

* See Sermon I. Vol. i.

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posed, and to be taken into consideration in all the designs and actions of men: this is to govern our whole life, and to have a main influence upon all the affairs and concernments of it. As the first principle of human society, and that which is to run through the whole frame of it, is the public good; this was always to be taken into consideration, and to give law to all laws and constitutions about it: so religion is the first principle of human wisdom, by which all our actions are to be conducted and governed; and all wisdom which does not begin here, and lay religion for its foundation, is preposterous, and begins at the wrong end; and is just as if, in the forming of human society, every one in the settlement of the constitution, and the framing of laws, should have an eye to his own private and particular advantage, without regard to the public good, which is the great end of society, and the rule and measure of government and laws, and, in the last issue and result of things, the only way to procure the settled welfare, and to secure the lasting interests of particular persons, so far as that is consistent with the public good. And it would be a very preposterous policy to go about to found human society upon any other terms, and would certainly end in mischief and confusion.

And such is all the wisdom of men, in relation to their true happiness, which does not begin with religion, and lay its foundation there: which does not take into consideration God and his providence, and a future state of rewards and punishments after this life. All wisdom which does not proceed upon a supposition of the truth and reality of these principles, will certainly end in shame and disappointment, in misery and ruin; because it builds a house

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upon the sand, which when it comes to be tried by stress of weather, and assaulted by violent storms, will undoubtedly fall, and the fall of it will be great.

And this error every man commits who pursues happiness by following his own inclination, and gratifying his irregular desires, without any consideration of God, and of the restraint which his laws have laid upon us, not for his own pleasure but for our good. For when all things are duly considered, and all accounts cast up, it will appear, upon a just calculation of things, that all the restraints which the laws of God lay upon men are highly reasonable, and greatly for their benefit and advantage, and do not abridge us of any pleasure or happiness; but are wise and merciful provisions of heaven, to prevent our harm and mischief; so that we are not wise, if we act without regard to God, and his laws, and are not willing to be governed by him, who loves us better than we do ourselves, and truly designs our happiness, and commands us nothing but what directly tends to it. For the laws of God are not arbitrary constitutions, and mere instances of sovereign will and power; but wise rules and means to procure and advance our happiness.

And, in like manner, all that wisdom which men use to compass their worldly designs, of riches and greatness, without consideration of the providence of God, and dependance upon it for the success of our affairs, is all perfect folly and mistake. For though the design be never so well laid and vigorously prosecuted, and no means, which human wisdom can devise for the attaining of our end, have been omitted by us; yet, if we leave God out of the account, we forget that which is principal, and signifies more to the success of any design, than all

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other things put together. For if God favours our designs, the most improbable shall take effect; and if he blow upon them, the most likely shall miscarry. Whenever he pleaseth to interpose to cross the counsels and designs of men, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to all."

So that it is great folly not to consider the providence of God in all our designs and undertakings, not to implore his favour and blessing, without which nothing that we take in hand can prosper. That which is principal to any purpose, ought to be considered in the first place, nothing being to be attempted either without or against it. And such is the providence of God in all human affairs; it is more considerable to the promoting or hindering of any event, than all things in the world besides; and therefore all policy, which sets aside God and his providence is vain; because there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.

So likewise all that wisdom which only considers and regards this short life, and the narrow concernments of it, and makes provision only for our welfare in this world; and therefore can only be tempted with the hopes of temporal advantages, and terrified only with the danger of temporal evils and sufferings; but hath no sense of an immortal spirit within us, no prospect of a life after death, no consideration of a happy or miserable eternity, of rewards and punishments, infinitely greater than all the temptations and terrors of time and sense: I say, all this is a preposterous and pernicious wis-

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dom, and proceeds upon a false supposition, and a quite contrary scheme of things to what really is; and consequently, our whole life, and all the designs and actions of it, do run upon a perpetual mistake, and a false stating of our own case; and whatever we do pursuant to this mistake is foolish and hurtful, and so far from conducing to our true interest, that it is all either besides it or contrary to it; because we act upon a supposal only of this life, and a being only in this world, and that there is nothing either to be feared or hoped for beyond it; and being thus grossly mistaken, we set our hearts only upon temporal things, and study our present security and satisfaction; and, in all our counsels and actions, are swayed only by the consideration of temporal good and evil, of the present ease and pleasure, the disturbance and pain of our fleshly and sensual parts; without any sense of our own immortality, and of that everlasting state which remains for us in another world.

But there is (my brethren) most certainly, there is another life after this; we are not beasts, if we do not make ourselves so; and if we die, we shall not die like them, neither shall our last end be like theirs. For whatever we may think or wish, it shall not be in our power to extinguish our own beings when we have a mind to be rid of them, and to choose whether or no we shall live for ever.

And if this be a false scheme of things which we have framed to ourselves, and proceed upon (as undoubtedly it is), then our whole life is one great error, and a perpetual mistake, and we are quite wrong in all that we design to do. Our wisdom hath begun at the wrong end, and we have made a false calculation and account of things, and have

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put our case otherwise than it is; and the farther we proceed upon this mistake, our miscarriage will be so much the more fatal in the issue. But if our wisdom begin at the right end, and our case be truly stated, that God hath put into these frail and mortal bodies of ours immortal spirits that shall live for ever; and hath sent us into this world to sojourn here for a little while, and to be disciplined and trained up for eternity; and that, after a short proof and trial of our obedience, we shall be translated into an everlasting state of unspeakable happiness or misery, according as we have demeaned ourselves in this world; if we believe this to be truly our case, our interest is then plainly before us, and we see where our happiness lies, and what remains for us to do, in order to the obtaining of it, and what we are to expect to suffer if we do it not.

Now this foundation being laid, it is evident, that the best thing we can do for ourselves, is to provide for our future state, and to secure the everlasting happiness of another life. And the best way to do that is, to live in obedience to those laws which our Maker and our sovereign hath prescribed to us; and according to which he will one day sentence us to eternal rewards or punishments.

It is evident, likewise, that all our sensual appetites and desires are to be bounded by the rules of reason and virtue, which are the laws of God; and that no present ease and pleasure, trouble and suffering, are to be considered and regarded by us, in competition with the things which are eternal; and that sin is of all other the greatest evil, and most mischievous to our main interest, and therefore with all possible care to be avoided; and that the favour of God is to be sought, and the salvation of our

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souls to be provided for, at any pains and expense whatsoever, and even with the hazard and loss of our dearest interests in this world, yea, and of life itself.

And now, if this matter hath been rightly stated, then religion and the fear of God is the first principle and foundation of true wisdom, and that which we are to consider, and take along with us in all the designs and actions of our lives; and all wisdom which does not begin here is preposterous, and will prove folly in the issue.

Secondly, As religion is the beginning of wisdom, so it is the perfection of it; it is the highest point of wisdom in which we can be instructed: "The fear of the Lord (says Solomon, Prov. xv. 33.)is the instruction of wisdom." "A good understanding (says David, Psal. cxi. 10.) have all they that do his commandments." The practice of religion is the perfection of wisdom; and he understands himself best who lives most according to the laws of God. And this I might shew, by instancing in particular virtues, the practice whereof is much wiser, and every way more for our interest, than the contrary vices; but this is too large an argument to engage in, and therefore I shall content myself at present, briefly to shew, that the chief characters and properties of wisdom do all meet in religion, and agree to it.

The first point of wisdom is to understand our true interest, and to be right in our main end; and in this religion will best instruct and direct us. And if we be right in our main end, and true to the interest of it, we cannot miscarry: but if a man mistake in this, he errs fatally, and his whole life is vanity and folly.

Another property of wisdom is to be steady and

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vigorous in the prosecution of our main end; to oblige us hereto religion gives us the most powerful arguments—the glorious happiness, and the dismal misery of another world.

The next point of wisdom is, to make all things stoop and become subservient to our main end. And wherever religion bears sway, it will make all other things subordinate to the salvation of our souls, and the interests of our everlasting happiness; as the men of this world make every thing to submit and give way to their covetous, and ambitious, and sensual designs.

Another part of wisdom is to consider the future, and to look to the last end and issue of things. It is a common folly among men to be so intent upon the present, as to have little or no regard to the future, to what will be hereafter. Men design and labour for this present life, and their short continuance here in this world, without taking into serious consideration their main duration, and their eternal abode in another world. But religion gives us a clear prospect of a life after death, and overlooks time, and makes eternity always present to us, and minds us of making timely provision and preparation for it. It takes into consideration our whole duration, and inspires us with wisdom, to look to the end of things, and to what will be hereafter, as well as to what is present.

It is likewise a great property of wisdom to secure the main chance, and to run no hazard in that. And this religion directs us to take care of, because the neglect of it will prove fatal.

Another mark of wisdom is, to lay hold of opportunities, those especially which, when they are once past, will never return again. There are some

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seasons wherein great things may be done, which, if they be let slip, are never to be retrieved. A wise man will lay hold of these, and improve them: and religion inculcates this principle of wisdom upon us, that this life is the opportunity of doing great things for ourselves, and of making ourselves for ever; this very day and hour may, for aught we know, be the last and only opportunity of repentance, and making our peace with God: therefore "to-day, whilst it is called to-day," let us set about this necessary work, "lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;" to-morrow it may be too late to begin it, and the justice of God may cut us off whilst we are wilfully delaying it; and the opportunities of saving our immortal souls may vanish, and be for ever hid from our eyes.

The next property of wisdom is, to foresee dangers, and to take timely care to prevent them. "The prudent man (saith Solomon) foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself;" that is, shelters and secures himself against it; "but the simple pass on and are punished;" that is, the evil overtakes them, and their folly is punished in their fatal ruin. Now, the greatest danger is from the greatest power; even from "Him who is able to save and to destroy:" "I will tell you (says the wisdom of God) whom ye shall fear: fear him who, after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell."

Again, another main point of wisdom is, to do as little as we can to be repented of, trusting rather to the wisdom of prevention, than to that of remedy. Religion first teacheth men innocency, and not to offend; but in case we do (as in many things we offend all), it then directs us to repentance as the only remedy. But this certainly is folly to sin in

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hopes of repentance; that is, first to make work for repentance, and then run the hazard of it; for we may certainly sin, but it is not certain that we shall repent. And if it were, yet it is great folly to lay in beforehand, and to make work for trouble; *Næ tu stultus homuncio es, qui malis veniam precari, quam non peccare,* was a wise saying of old Cato: "Thou art (says he) a silly man indeed, who choosest rather to ask forgiveness, than not to offend." If a man had the best remedy in the world, he would not make himself sick to try the virtue of it; and it is a known comparison, and a very fit one, that repentance is *tabula post naufragium,* "a plank after shipwreck." But I am greatly afraid that thousands of souls, who have trusted to it, have perished before they could get to land, with this plank in their arms.

The last character of wisdom I shall mention is, in all things to consult the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, without which nothing else can make us happy: and this, obedience to the laws of God does naturally procure. "Great peace have they (says David) that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." "The work of righteousness (says the prophet) shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." The fear of God, and the keeping of his commandments, is the best preservative against the troubles of a guilty conscience, and the terrifying apprehensions of a future judgment. And this is the great wisdom of religion; that whosoever liveth according to the rules and precepts of it, prevents the chief causes of discontent, and lays the surest foundation of a perpetual satisfaction of mind, a jewel of inestimable price, which none knows but he that has it, and he that hath it knows the value of it too well to

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part with it for the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, and which always prove bitterness in the end, and, for the little sweetness which they yielded, leave a terrible sting behind them.

Thus I have briefly represented the reasonableness and wisdom of religion. It is of infinite perfection, and of a vast influence and extent; it reacheth to the whole man, the happiness of soul and body; and to our whole duration, the happiness of this world and the next; for godliness, that is, true religion and piety, hath the promise of this life, and of that which is to come.

But, now, where are the effects of true religion, in the full compass and extent of it, to be found? such real effects as do, in any measure, bear a proportion to the power and perfection of their cause? for nothing, certainly, is more excellent and amiable in its definition than true religion is; but, alas! how imperfect is it in the subject! I mean in us, who ought to shew forth the power and perfection of it, in the practice and actions of our lives, the best demonstration of the excellent frame and temper of our minds.

What a conflict and struggling do the best men find between their inclination and their duty! how hard to reconcile our practice and our knowledge, and to make our lives to agree with the reason of our minds, and the clear conviction of our consciences! How difficult for a man, in this dangerous and imperfect state, to be, in any measure, either so wise or good as he ought! How rare is it for a man to be good-natured, gentle, and easy to be entreated, without being often betrayed into some weakness and sinful compliances, especially in the bad company of our betters! How next to impossible is it to

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be strict and severe in our lives, without being sour! to govern our lives with that perpetual caution, and to maintain that evenness of temper, as not to be sometimes peevish and passionate! and, when we are so, not to be apt to say with Jonah, "we do well to be angry!"

There are two precepts in the New Testament, that seem to me to be the nicest of all other, and hardest to be put in practice. One is that of our blessed Saviour, "be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves." How hard is it to hit upon the just temper of wisdom and innocency; to be wise, and hurt nobody; to be innocent, without being silly! The other is that of the apostle, "be angry and sin not." How difficult is this—never to be angry but upon just cause! and, when the cause of our anger is just, not to be transported beyond due bounds, either as to the degree of our anger, or as to the duration and continuance of it: this is so very nice a matter, that one would be almost tempted to think, that this were, in effect, a prohibition of anger in any case: "be ye angry, and sin not:" be ye so, if ye can, without sin. I believe whosoever observes it, will find that it is as easy to suppress this passion at any time, as to give way to it, without offending in one kind or other. But to proceed,

How hard a matter is it to be much in company, and free in conversation, and not to be infected by it? to live in the midst of a wicked world, and yet to keep ourselves free from the vices of it? to be temperate in the use of things pleasing, so as neither to injure our health, nor to lose the use of our reason, nor to offend against conscience? to fast often, without being conceited of it, and bargaining, as it were, with God for some greater liberties in another

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kind; and without censuring those who do not tie up themselves to our strict rules, either of piety or abstinence? when, perhaps, they have neither the same opportunities of doing it, nor the same reason to do it that we have; nay, perhaps, have a much better reason for not doing just as we do: for no man is to prescribe to others his own private method, either of fasting or of devotion, as if he were the rule, and his example a kind of proclamation, enjoining all his neighbours the same days of fasting and prayer which he himself, for reasons best known to himself, thinks fit to observe.

And, then, how hard is it to be cheerful without being vain? and grave and serious, without being morose? to be useful and instructive to others in our conversation and discourse, without assuming too much authority to ourselves? which is not the best and most effectual way of doing good to others; there being something in the nature of man which had rather take a hint and intimation from another, to advise himself, and would rather choose to imitate the silent good example which they see in another, than to have either his advice or his example imposed upon them.

How difficult is it to have a mind equal to every condition, and to be content with mean and moderate things? to be patient in adversity, and humble in prosperity, and meek upon sudden and violent provocations? to keep our passions free from getting head of our reason, and our zeal from outrunning our knowledge? to have a will perfectly submitted and resigned to the will of God, even when it lies cross and thwart to ours, so that whatever pleases God should please us? to be resolute when our duty happens to be difficult and dangerous; or even

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to believe that to be our duty (though it certainly be so) which is very inconvenient for us to do? to hold out and be unwearied in well-doing? to be careful to preserve our lives, and yet, upon a great occasion, and whenever God calls for them, to be content to lay them down?

To be wise and innocent; men in understanding, and yet in malice children? to have many great virtues, and not to want that which gives the great lustre to them all, I mean real and unaffected modesty and humility? In short,

How difficult is it to have regard to all God's commandments, and to hate every evil and false way? to have our duty continually in our eye, and ready to be put into practice upon every proper occasion? to have God and the consideration of another world always before us, present to our minds, and operative upon our practice? to live as those that know they must die, and to have our thoughts perpetually awake, and intent upon the great and everlasting concernments of our immortal souls?

These are great things, indeed, easy to be talked of, but hard to be done; nay, not to be done at all without frequent and fervent prayer to God, and the continual aids and supplies of his grace; not without an earnest endeavour on our parts, a vigorous resistance of temptations, and many a sore conflict with our own perverse wills and sensual inclinations; not without a perpetual guard and watchfulness over our lives, and our unruly appetites and passions.

Little do inexperienced men, and those who have taken no great pains with themselves, imagine, what thought and consideration, what care and attention, what resolution and firmness of mind, what diligence

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and patient continuance in well-doing, are requisite to make a truly good man; such an one as St. Paul describes, that is, "perfect and entire, and wanting nothing;" that follows God fully, and fulfils every part of his duty, having "a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." Who is there among us, that is either wise enough for his own direction, or good enough for the peace and satisfaction of his own mind; that is so happy as to know his duty, and to do it; as to have both the understanding and the will to do in all things as he ought?

After our best care, and all our pains and endeavours, the most of us will still find a great many defects in our lives, and cannot but discern great and manifold imperfections in our very best duties and services; insomuch, that we shall be forced to make the same acknowledgment concerning them, which Solomon does concerning the imperfection of all things under the sun; "that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." And, when all is done, we have all of us reason to say, not only that "we are unprofitable servants, having done nothing but what was our duty to do;" but have cause likewise, with great shame and confusion of face, to acknowledge that we have been in many respects wicked and slothful servants; and so very far from having done what was our duty to do, that the greatest part of the good which the most of us have done, is the least part of the good which we might and ought to have done.

The practice of religion, in all the parts and instances of our duty, is work more than enough for the best and greatest mind, for the longest and best

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ordered life, "the commandment of God is exceeding broad;" and an obedience, in any good measure equal to the extent of it, extremely difficult. And, after all, as the man in the gospel said, with tears, to our Saviour, concerning the weakness of his own faith, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." (Mark ix. 24.) So the best of men may say, and say it with tears too, concerning every grace and virtue wherein they excel most; "Lord, I aspire, I endeavour after it, be thou pleased to assist my weakness, and to help me by thy grace continually to do better."

The sum of all is this: if we be careful to do our best, and make it the constant and sincere endeavour of our lives to please God, and to keep his commandments, we shall be accepted of him: for God values this more than "whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices," more than "thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil;" because this is an essential part of religion, "To love God with all our hearts, and minds, and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves." The duties comprehended in these two great commandments, sincerely practised by us (though with a great deal of imperfection), will certainly be acceptable in the sight of God, in and through the merits and mediation of "Jesus Christ the righteous." "Blessed are they (saith St. John very plainly, in the conclusion of that obscure book of his Revelation), blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life." (Rev. xxii. 14.)

I speak now to a great many who are at the upper end of the world, and command all the pleasures and enjoyments of it; but the time is coming, and (whether we think of it or not) is very near at hand,

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when we shall see "an end of all perfection," and of all that is desirable upon earth, and upon which men are apt to value themselves so much in this world; and then nothing but religion, and the conscience of having done our duty to God and man, will stand us in stead, and yield true comfort to us. When we are going to leave the world, how shall we then wish that we had made religion the great business of our lives; and, in the day of God's grace and mercy, had exercised repentance, and made our peace with God, and prepared ourselves for another world; that, after our departure hence, we might be admitted into "the presence of God, where is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore?"

Let no man, therefore, of what rank or condition soever he be in this world, think himself too great to be good, and too wise to be religious, and to take care of his immortal soul, and his everlasting happiness in another world; since nothing but this will approve itself to be true wisdom at the last. All other things will have an end with this life; but religion and the fear of God is of a vast extent, and hath an influence upon our whole duration; and, after the course of this life is ended, will put us into the secure possession of a happiness, which shall never have an end.

I will conclude this whole discourse with those words of our blessed Saviour, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." Which thou, who art the eternal spring of truth and goodness, grant that we may all know and do in this our day, for thy mercies' sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.

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SERMON XCVI.

THE NATURE AND INFLUENCE OF THE PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature.—2 PET. i. 4.

THE connexion of these words with the former is somewhat obscure, but it seems to be this: the apostle had, in the verse before, said, that "the Divine power of Christ hath, by the knowledge of the gospel, given us all things that pertain to life and godliness;" that is, by the knowledge of the gospel, we are furnished with all advantages which conduce to make men happy in the next life, and religious in this; and then it follows, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises."—"Whereby;" this seems to refer to the whole of the foregoing verse; as if it had been said, Christ, by the gospel, hath given to us all things that conduce to our future happiness; and, in order thereto, all things which tend to make men holy and good. Or else, life and godliness are, by a Hebraism frequent in the New Testament, put for a godly life. And then, among all those things which conduce to a godly life, the apostle instanceth in the promises of the gospel, which do so directly tend to make men "partakers of a Divine nature."

In the handling of these words, I shall,

First, Consider the promises here spoken of;

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" Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises."

Secondly, The influence which these promises ought to have upon us; " that by these ye might be made partakers of a Divine nature."

First, We will consider the promises which are here spoken of; " Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." And, because the chief promises of the gospel are here intended, I shall take occasion from this text to handle the doctrine of the promises, which is frequently discoursed of in divinity, but not always so clearly stated. And to this purpose it will be proper to take into consideration these four things:

I. What the promises are which are here spoken of; " Whereby are given unto us promises."

II. Why they are said to be so great and precious; " exceeding great and precious promises."

III. We will consider the tenor of these promises.

IV. When men are said to have a right to them, so as they might apply them to themselves. These four heads will comprehend what I have to say upon this argument.

I. What the promises are which the apostle here speaks of; " Whereby are given unto us promises." And, no doubt, the apostle here intends those great and excellent promises which Christ hath made to us in the gospel. So that to satisfy ourselves in this inquiry, we need only to consider, what are the principal promises of the gospel. Now the great promises of the gospel are these three.

1. The promise of the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance.

2. The promise of God's grace and Holy Spirit to assist our obedience.

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3. The promise of eternal life to reward it.

1. The promise of the pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance. The gospel hath made full and clear promises to this purpose; that if we believe the gospel, and will forsake our sins, and amend our wicked lives, all that is past shall be forgiven us, and that Christ died for this end, to obtain for us remission of sins in his blood. The light of nature, upon consideration of the mercy and goodness of God, gave men good hopes that, upon their repentance, God would forgive their sins, and turn away his wrath from them. But mankind was doubtful of this, and therefore they used expiatory sacrifices to appease the offended Deity. The Jewish religion allowed of no expiation, but for legal impurities and involuntary transgressions, such as proceeded from ignorance and inadvertency; but not for sins of presumption, and such as were committed with a high hand. If men sinned wilfully, there was no sacrifice appointed by the law for such sins. But the grace of the gospel justifies us from the greatest sins, upon our faith and sincere repentance. So St. Paul tells the Jews: (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." There was no general promise of pardon, nor way of expiation, under the law; perfect remission of sins is clearly revealed and ascertained to us only by the gospel.

2. Another great promise of the gospel is, the promise of God's grace and Holy Spirit to assist our obedience. Our blessed Saviour hath promised that "our heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit

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to them that ask him." It is true, indeed, there was a peculiar promise of the Holy Ghost to the apostles and Christians of the first ages, which is not now to be expected; namely, an extraordinary and miraculous power, whereby they were qualified to publish the gospel to the world, and to give confirmation to it. But now that the Christian religion is propagated and settled in the world, the great end and use of these miraculous gifts is ceased; but yet the Spirit of God doth still concur with the gospel, and work upon the minds of men, to excite and assist them to that which is good. And though this operation be very secret, so as we cannot give an account of the manner of it, yet the effects of it are very sensible; and this influence of God's Holy Spirit is common to all Christians in all ages of the world. This proposition is universally true, and in all ages and times—"If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

It must be acknowledged, that the Spirit doth not now work upon men in that sudden and sensible manner, as it did in the first times of Christianity; because then men were strongly possessed with the prejudices of other religions, which they had been brought up in; and therefore, as more outward means of conviction were then necessary, so likewise a more powerful internal operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, to concur and bear down those prejudices, and to subdue them to the obedience of faith. But now the principles of religion and goodness are more gradually instilled into the minds of men, by the gentle degrees of pious instruction and education; and with these means the Spirit of God concurs in a more human way, which is more suited and accommodated to our

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reason, and offers less violence to the nature of men. So that this promise of God's Holy Spirit is now made good to us, as the necessity and circumstances of our present state do require. God does not use such extraordinary means for the producing of those effects, which may be accomplished in a more ordinary way. The assistance of God's Holy Spirit is still necessary to men, to incline and enable them to that which is good; but not in that manner and degree that it was necessary at first: because, the prejudices against Christianity are not now so great, and many of those advantages which were necessarily wanting at first, are now supplied in an ordinary way; and therefore it is not reasonable now to expect the same extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, which we read of in the first beginnings of Christianity.

3. There is likewise the promise of eternal life to reward and crown our obedience. And this the Scripture speaks of as the great promise of the gospel: (1 John ii. 25.) "This is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life." And upon this account, the new covenant of the gospel is preferred before the old covenant of the law, because it is established upon better promises. All the special and particular promises of the law were of temporal good things, and these were the great encouragements that were given to obedience, under that imperfect dispensation: but now "godliness hath not only the promise of the life that now is, but of that which is to come;" as the apostle tells us, 1 Tim. iv. 8. The gospel hath clearly revealed to us a happy state of immortality after this life, of which men had but very obscure and doubtful apprehensions. So the apostle tells us: (2 Tim. i. 10.)

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"That it is now made manifest, by the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel." Holy men had good hopes of it before; but they had no sure, distinct apprehensions of it, no such full assurance concerning it, no such clear and express promises of it, as the gospel hath given us.

Thus you see what those great promises are which the gospel hath given us; namely, the promise of the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance; the promise of God's grace and Holy Spirit to assist our obedience; and the promise of eternal life and happiness to reward it. These are the three eminent promises of the gospel, and, in all probability, those which the apostle here calls "great and precious promises;" which brings me to the

II. Second thing which I propounded to consider; namely, why they are said to be "exceeding great and precious, τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, the greatest and the most valuable promises." And to satisfy us that they are such, the very consideration of the blessings and benefits that they carry in them will be sufficient: if we consider the condition that mankind was in, when God was pleased to make these gracious declarations to us, we shall see great reason to set a high value upon every one of these promises. Mankind was extremely degenerated, all flesh had corrupted its ways, and the whole world was guilty before God, and liable to all that misery which the sinner had reason to apprehend from the incensed justice of the Almighty. We had forfeited that happiness to which our immortal nature was designed, and, which made our condition

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more sad, we were without strength to recover ourselves out of it, by our repentance for what was past (if God would have accepted of it), and by our future obedience. Now the promises of the gospel offer relief to us in all these respects, and thereby obviate all the difficulties and discouragements which mankind lay under.

The gracious promise of pardon frees us from guilt, and secures us from the terrible wrath of God, which our guilty consciences did so much dread; and without this promise, mankind would have been under the greatest doubts and discouragements. For when men are afraid their sins are greater than will be forgiven them, they are apt to fall into despair, and despair is an effectual bar to repentance; for when men think their condition is desperate, they care not what they do.

And the promise of God's grace and Holy Spirit, to assist and enable us to do our duty, does fully answer all the discouragements and objections from our own weakness, and the power of temptation. We may do all things through Christ strengthening us: and how weak soever we are of ourselves, we are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." If God be for us, who, or what, can stand against us? The devil is a very powerful enemy, and much too strong for flesh and blood to encounter in its own strength; but there is another principle in the world, which is mightier and more powerful than he, the Holy Spirit of God, who is always ready to help, when we do not repulse and refuse his assistance; "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world," says the apostle, 1 John iv. 4. The Spirit of God dwells in all those who are willing to admit him, and is ever ready to assist

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those who comply with his blessed motions, and do vigorously put forth their own endeavours.

And then the promise of eternal life, that answers all the difficulties of our obedience, and sets us above any thing that the world can threaten us withal, for our constancy to God and his truth. A wise man will be content to suffer any thing, or to quit any thing, upon terms of far greater advantage: and what greater consideration can be offered to encourage our constancy and obedience, than an eternity of happiness? So that the apostle had reason to call these "exceeding great and valuable promises;" so valuable, that if any one of them had been wanting, our redemption and recovery had either been absolutely impossible, or extremely difficult. I proceed to the

III. Third thing I propounded, which was to consider the tenour of these promises; that is, whether God hath made them absolutely to us, without requiring any thing to be done on our part, or upon certain terms and conditions to be performed by us. That God may (if he please) make an absolute promise of any blessing or benefit to us, there is no doubt; and that God's grace does prevent many, and is beforehand with them, is as little to be doubted: the Spirit of God goes along with the gospel, moving and inclining men to yield obedience to it, many times before any inclination and disposition thereto on their parts. But as to this promise of God's grace and Holy Spirit, the great question is, not about the first motion of it, but the continuance of this assistance, and the increase of it; and this, I think, may safely be affirmed, is promised only conditionally, as also the pardon of sin, and eternal life. And concerning each of these, the

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matter may quickly be decided, by plain texts of Scripture.

Concerning the promise of the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit, the Scripture takes notice of two conditions. First, That we beg it earnestly of God: and this our Saviour expresseth by asking, seeking, and knocking, which signifies the importunity of our requests; our heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that thus ask it. And then, secondly, That we improve and make use of the grace which God affords us: "To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away, even that which he seems to have." That is (as appears plainly from the scope of the parable), to him that useth that grace and those advantages which God affords him, more shall be given; but from him that makes no use of them, and, therefore, is as if he had them not, shall be taken away that which he but seems to have, because he makes no use of it.

Concerning the pardon of sins: the Scripture plainly suspends that upon the general condition of repentance, and the change of our lives; "Repent, that your sins may be forgiven you:" and upon the condition of our forgiving others; "If ye forgive men their trespasses, then will your heavenly Father also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses," says our Saviour. (Matt. vi. 14, 15.)

And then the promise of eternal life, is every where in Scripture suspended upon the condition of faith and repentance, and perseverance in well-doing. "He that believes (says our Saviour) shall be saved;" which, indeed, implies the whole condition

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of the gospel. "He that believes;" that is, he that effectually assents to the doctrine of Christ, and is so persuaded of the truth of it, as to live according to it, shall be saved. But if obedience were not included in the Scripture notion of faith, yet the Scripture elsewhere expressly makes it the condition of our eternal salvation. (Heb. v. 9.) Christ is there said to be "the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;" thereby implying, that none shall be saved by Christ, but those that obey the gospel. (Heb. xii. 14.) "Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." (Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9.) "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality," God will give "eternal life; but to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth (that is the gospel), but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil."

I cannot well imagine what can reasonably be answered to such plain texts; but I will tell you what is commonly answered; namely, that God gives the condition which he requires, and therefore, though these promises run into a conditional form, yet in truth they are absolute; because he that makes a promise to another, upon a condition which he will also perform, doth in effect make an absolute promise. As if a man promised another such an estate, upon condition he pay such a sum for it, and does promise withal to furnish him with that sum, this in effect amounts to an absolute promise of the estate.

And this is very well argued, if the case were thus. But God hath no where promised to work the condition in us without the concurrence of our

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own endeavours. God may, and oftentimes doth, prevent men by his grace; but he hath no where promised to give his Holy Spirit but to them that ask it of him. And he hath no where promised to continue his grace and assistance to us, unless we will use our sincere endeavours; nay, in case we do not, he hath threatened to take away his grace and assistance from us. And if this be so, then the promises of the gospel do not only seem to be conditional, but are really so. And it is a wonder that any man should doubt of this, who considers how frequently, in the New Testament, the gospel is represented to us under the notion of a covenant; such a covenant, in the very nature of it, doth imply a mutual obligation between the parties that enter into it. But if the gospel contain only blessings which are promised on God's part, without any thing required to be done and performed on our part, in order to the obtaining of those blessings, then the gospel is nothing else but a promise, or deed of gift, making over certain benefits and blessings to us; but can, in no propriety of language in the world, be called a covenant: but if there be some things required on our part, in order to our being made partakers of the promises which God hath made to us (as the Scripture every where tells us there is), then the promises are plainly conditional. To instance in the promise of forgiveness of sins; "Repent, that your sins may be blotted out;" that is, upon this condition, that ye repent of your sins, they shall be forgiven, and not otherwise. Can there be any plainer condition in the world than this, in those words of our Saviour? "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive your trespasses; but if ye forgive not men

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their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses."

This is so far from being any prejudice to the freeness of God's grace, who is infinitely gracious in offering such great blessings to us upon any condition that we can perform; that it were one of the absurdest things in the world, to imagine that God should grant to men forgiveness of sins and eternal life, let them behave themselves as they will.

IV. The last thing I proposed for the explaining of this doctrine of the promises of God, was, to consider when men may be said to have a right to these promises, so as to be able upon good grounds to apply them to themselves: and the answer to this is very plain and easy; namely, when they find the conditions of these promises in themselves, and not till then.

When a man hath truly repented of his sins so as to forsake them, and lead a new life; and when he does from his heart forgive those that have offended him, and hath laid down all animosity against them, and thoughts of revenge; then hath he a right to the promise of pardon and forgiveness, and may apply to himself in particular what the Scripture saith in general, that God will "blot out all his transgressions, and remember his iniquities no more." When a man doth constantly and earnestly implore the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, and is ready to yield to the motions of it, and does faithfully make use of that strength and assistance which God affords him, then he may expect the continuance of his grace, and further degrees of it. When a man makes it the constant and sincere endeavour of his life, to please God, and to "walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord

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blameless," and is effectually taught by the grace of God to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world," then he may with comfort and joy "wait for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" then he may with confidence depend upon God, "in sure and certain hope of that eternal life which God, that cannot lie, hath promised." When he can say with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith;" then he may likewise triumph as he did, "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God the righteous Judge shall give me in that day."

Upon these terms, and in these cases, men may upon good grounds apply to themselves "these exceeding great and precious promises" of the gospel; and so far as any man is doubtful and uncertain of the performance of the conditions which the gospel requires, so far he must necessarily question his right and title to the blessings promised. And if any man think this doctrine too uncomfortable, and be willing to reject it upon this account, I shall only say this, that men may cheat themselves if they please, but most certainly they will never find any true and solid comfort in any other. This is a plain and sensible account of a man's confidence and good hopes in the promises of God; but for a man to apply any promise to himself, before he finds the condition in himself, is not faith, but either fancy or presumption.

And, therefore, it is a very preposterous course which many take, to advise and exhort men, with so much earnestness, to apply the promises of God

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to themselves, and to tell them that they are guilty of great unbelief in not doing it. That which is proper to exhort men to is, to endeavour to perform the condition upon which God hath promised any blessing to us; and when men find the condition in themselves, they will, without any great persuasion, take comfort from the promise, and apply it to themselves; but till they discern the condition in themselves, it is impossible for a man that understands himself to apply the promise to himself; for till the condition be performed, he hath no more right to the promise than if such a promise had never been made. And it is so far from being a sin in such a man to doubt of the benefit of such a promise, that it is his duty to do so; and no man that understands himself and the promises of God can possibly do otherwise.

Therefore, it is a vain and groundless trouble which perplexeth many people, that they cannot apply the promises of God to themselves; whereas, the true ground of their trouble should be this, that they have not been careful to perform the condition of those promises which they would apply to themselves: the other is an endless trouble; let them but look to the condition, and the promise will apply itself. I speak all this on purpose to free men from those perplexities wherewith many have entangled themselves by false apprehensions of the promises of God, either as if they were not made to us upon certain conditions to be performed by us, or as if any man could comfortably apply them to himself, before he hath performed those conditions, upon which God hath made such promises. For if men will believe that which is not true, or expect things upon such terms as they are not to be

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had, they may trouble themselves eternally, and all the world cannot help it.

I have now done with the first thing I propounded to speak to; namely, the promises which are here spoken of. The second thing (viz.) what influence these promises ought to have upon us, "that by them we may be made partakers of the Divine nature," I shall reserve to another opportunity.

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SERMON XCVII.

THE NATURE AND INFLUENCE OF THE PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature.—2 PET. i. 4.

I MADE entrance into these words the last day, in the handling whereof I proposed to do these two things:—

First, To consider the promises here spoken of: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises."

Secondly, The influence which these promises ought to have upon us: "that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature."

The first of these I have done with, and proceed now to the

Second, viz. The influence which these promises ought to have upon us: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature." Not that we can partake of the essence and nature of God, as some have blasphemously affirmed, pretending, in their canting and senseless language, to be Godded with God and Christed with Christ. In this sense it is impossible for us to "partake of the Divine nature;" for this would be for men to become gods, and to be advanced to the state and perfection of the Deity. But the word φύσις doth

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frequently, in Scripture, signify a temper and disposition; and to be "partakers of a Divine nature" is to be of a Divine temper and disposition, to have our corrupt natures rectified and purged from all sinful lusts and irregular passions, and from all vicious and corrupt affections; and therefore it follows in the text: "Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust; and, besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity." So that we are "made partakers of a Divine nature," as the apostle here explains it, these two ways: by cleansing ourselves from the lusts of the flesh, which the apostle here calls the "corruption or defilement which is in the world through lust;" and by a diligent endeavour after all Christian graces and virtues, faith, and temperance, and patience, a sincere love of the brethren, and an universal charity and good-will towards all men.

And that this is the proper influence and efficacy of the great promises of the gospel upon the hearts and lives of men, the apostle St. Paul fully declares to us: (2 Cor. vii. 1.) "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit;" that is, from the lusts of the flesh, and of uncleanness, and from all evil and corrupt affections of the mind, such as wrath, envy, malice, hatred, strife, revenge, cruelty, pride, and the like; "perfecting holiness in the fear of God;" that is, continually aspiring still more and more after further degrees of holiness, and virtue, and goodness, which are the great perfec-

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tions of the Divine nature. And thus, by a constant and sincere endeavour "to cleanse ourselves from all impurity of flesh and spirit," and by "practising all the virtues of a good life," we shall, by degrees, raise and advance ourselves to a godlike temper and disposition, imitating in all our actions the goodness, and mercy, and patience, and truth, and faithfulness of God, and all those other perfections of the Divine nature, which are comprehended under the term of holiness. This is that which the apostle here calls "partaking of a Divine nature;" or, as our blessed Saviour expresseth it, "to be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."

This the gospel designs to raise us to; and one of the great instruments whereby this is effected, are those "exceeding great and precious promises" which I have insisted upon; and they are capable of effecting it these two ways:—

First, By way of internal efficacy and assistance; and,

Secondly, By way of external motive and argument: both these ways some or other of these promises have a mighty influence upon us (if we be not wanting to ourselves) to raise us to a godlike temper and disposition; that is, to the greatest perfection of virtue and goodness which we are capable of in this life.

First, By way of internal efficacy and assistance. And this influence the promise of God's Holy Spirit, and of his gracious help and assistance thereof, hath upon the minds of men, inclining them to that which is good, and enabling them to do it. For the Holy Spirit is promised to us, in consideration and commiseration of that impotency and weakness which we have contracted in that degenerate and depraved

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condition into which mankind is sunk; to help us, who are without strength, to recover ourselves out of that evil and miserable state into which, by wilful transgression, we are fallen; to "quicken us who are dead in trespasses and sins (as the Scripture expresseth the condition of unregenerate persons), to raise us to a new life," and to cherish this principle of spiritual life, which is commonly weak at first, and to carry it through all discouragements and oppositions; to excite us continually to our duty, and to enable us to the most difficult parts of obedience, such as are most contrary to our natural inclinations, and against the grain of flesh and blood; to bear down the strength of sin and temptation; and in all our conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil, and all the powers of darkness, to make us victorious over them; and, in a word, to be a principle within us more mighty and powerful than the lusts and inclinations of our evil hearts, than the most obstinate and inveterate habits of sin and vice, and than all the temptations and terrors of sense. So that if we will make use of this assistance, and lay hold of this strength which God affords us in the gospel, and (as the apostle expresseth it) "be workers together with God," we need not despair of victory and success; for our strength will continually increase, and the force and violence of our lusts will be abated; God will give us more grace, and we shall "walk from strength to strength," and "our path will be (as Solomon says of 'the way of the righteous') as the light which shines more and more unto the perfect day."

For the Holy Spirit of God conducts and manageth this great work of our sanctification and salvation, from first to last, by opening our hearts

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to let in the light of Divine truth upon our minds, by representing to us with advantage such arguments and considerations as are apt to persuade us to embrace it and yield to it; by secret and gentle reprehensions softening our hard hearts, and bending our stiff and stubborn wills to a compliance with the will of God and our duty. And this is that great work which the Scripture calls our regeneration and sanctification, the "turning us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," a new creation and a resurrection from the death of sin to the life of holiness. And then by leading and directing us in the ways of holiness and obedience, by quickening our devotion, and stirring up in us holy desires and dispositions of soul, rendering us fit to draw near to God in prayer, with a due sense of our own wants and unworthiness, and an humble confidence in the goodness of God, that he will grant us those good things that we ask of him, in supporting and comforting us in all our afflictions and sufferings, especially for truth and righteousness sake; and by sealing and confirming to us the blessed hopes of eternal life. Thus the Spirit of God carries on the work of our sanctification, and makes us partakers of a Divine nature, by way of inward efficacy and assistance.

Secondly, The promises of the gospel are apt likewise to have a mighty influence upon us by way of motive and argument, to engage and encourage us to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God." For,

First, A full pardon and indemnity for what is past, is a mighty encouragement for us to return to our duty, and a forcible argument to keep us to it

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for the future. For since God, who hath been so highly injured and affronted by us, is so willing and ready to forgive us, as not only to provide and purchase for us the means of our pardon, by the grievous sufferings of his dear Son, but to offer it so freely, and invite us so earnestly to accept of it, and to be reconciled to him; the consideration of this ought in all reason, ingenuity, and gratitude, to melt us into sorrow and repentance for our sins, and a deep sense of the evil of them, and to inflame our hearts with a mighty love to God, and our blessed Redeemer, "who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood;" and to make us extremely unwilling, nay, most firmly resolved never more to offend that merciful and gracious God, who is so slow to punish, and so forward to forgive; and effectually to engage us to a dutiful, and constant, and cheerful obedience to God's holy laws and commandments, lest by our wilful transgression and violation of them, we should run ourselves into a deeper guilt, and aggravate our condemnation. Now that by the tender mercies of our God we are made whole, we should be infinitely afraid to sin any more, lest worse things should come to us; lest we relapse into a more incurable state, and bring a heavier load of guilt and misery upon ourselves.

Secondly, The promise of God's grace and Holy Spirit is, likewise, a very powerful argument and encouragement to holiness and goodness, engaging us to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," that our souls and minds may be a fit temple for the Holy Ghost, which will not dwell in an impure soul: and likewise encouraging us hereto by this consideration, that we have so unerring a guide to counsel and direct us, so powerful an assistant to,

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"strengthen us with all might in the inner man," to stand by us in all our conflicts with sin and Satan, and make us (as the apostle expresseth it) "more than conquerors" over all our spiritual enemies. For though we be weak, and our lusts strong, our enemies many, and temptations mighty and violent; yet we need not be disheartened, so long as we know that God is with us, and the grace of his Holy Spirit sufficient for us, against all the strength of sin and hell; though our duty be hard, and our strength small, yet we cannot fail of success, if we be sure that the omnipotent grace of God is always ready to second our sincere, though never so weak, endeavours. So that, when we see all the enemies of our salvation drawn up in array against us, we may encourage ourselves, as the prophet Elisha did his servant, when he told him, that an host compassed the city with horses and chariots, and said, "Alas! my master, how shall we do?" And "he answered, Fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them;" (2 Kings vi. 16.) or, as Hezekiah comforted the people, when they were afraid of the mighty force of the King of Assyria: (2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8.) "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight for us." This is the case of every Christian; the force that is against us is finite and limited; but the Almighty God is on our side, and fights for us; and every one of us may say with St. Paul, (Phil. iv. 13.) "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Thirdly, The promise of eternal life and happi-

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ness, if duly weighed and considered, hath a mighty force in it, to take us off from the love and practice of sin, and to encourage our obedience and patient continuance in well-doing. The assurance of enjoying unspeakable and endless happiness in another world, and of escaping extreme and eternal misery, is a consideration of that weight, as one would think could not fail of its efficacy upon us, to put all temptations to sin out of countenance, and to bear down before us all the difficulties and discouragements in the way of our duty. And if this make no impression upon us, if heaven and hell be of no weight with us, it will be in vain to use any other arguments, which, in comparison of this, are but as the very small dust upon the balance. For if, on the one hand, the hopes of perfect comfort, and joy, and felicity, perpetual in duration, and vast beyond all imagination, such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man to conceive:" and if, on the other hand, the dread of the terrible wrath of God, and of the vengeance of eternal fire, together with the insupportable torments of a guilty conscience, and the perpetual stings of bitter remorse and anguish for the wilful folly of our wicked lives, and the rage of horrible despair of ever getting out of so miserable a state; if neither of these considerations, if both of them will not prevail upon us to cease to be evil, and to resolve to be good, that we may obtain one of these conditions, and may escape the other; there is no hope that any words that can be used, any arguments and considerations that can be offered, should work upon us, or take place with us. He that is not to be tempted by such hopes, nor to be terrified by such fears, is proof against all the force of persuasion in the world.

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And thus I have done with the two things which I proposed to consider from these words; the nature of these promises, and the influence they are apt, and ought, to have upon us, to raise us to the perfection of virtue and goodness, which the apostle here calls our being partakers of a Divine nature. All that now remains is, to make some useful reflections upon what hath been discoursed upon these two heads.

First of all, If we expect the blessings and benefits of these exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, we must be careful to perform the conditions which are indispensably required on our parts. It is a great mistake, and of very pernicious consequence to the souls of men, to imagine that the gospel is all promises on God's part, and that our part is only to believe them, and to rely upon God for the performance of them, and to be very confident that he will make them good, though we do nothing else but only believe that he will do so. That the Christian religion is only a declaration of God's good-will to us, without any expectation of duty from us: this is an error which one could hardly think could ever enter into any who have the liberty to read the Bible, and do attend to what they read and find there.

The three great promises of the gospel are very expressly contained in our Saviour's first sermon upon the Mount. There we find the promise of blessedness often repeated; but never absolutely made, but upon certain conditions, and plainly required on our parts; as repentance, humility, righteousness, mercy, peaceableness, meekness, patience. Forgiveness of sins is likewise promised; but only to those that make a penitent acknowledgment of

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them, and ask forgiveness for them, and are ready to grant that forgiveness to others, which they beg of God for themselves. The gift of God's Holy Spirit is likewise there promised; but it is upon condition of our earnest and importunate prayer to God. The gospel is every where full of precepts, enjoining duty and obedience on our part, as well as of promises on God's part, assuring blessings to us; nay, of terrible threatenings also if we disobey the precepts of the gospel. St. Paul gives us the sum of the gospel in very few and plain words, declaring upon what terms we may expect that salvation which the gospel offers to all men: (Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13, 14.) "The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And then he adds, "these things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority;" intimating, that though men were very averse to this doctrine, it ought to be inculcated with great authority and earnestness, and those who opposed and despised it, to be severely rebuked: and with great reason, because the contrary doctrine does most effectually undermine and defeat the whole design of the Christian religion.

Secondly, From hence we learn, that if the promises of the gospel have not this effect upon us, to make us partakers of a Divine nature, it is our own fault, and because we are wanting to ourselves. God is always ready to do his part, if we do not fail

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in ours. There is a Divine power and efficacy goes along with the gospel, to make way for the entertainment of it in the hearts of men, where they put no bar and obstacle to it. But if men will resist the motions of God's blessed Spirit, and quench the light of it, and obstinately hold out against the force of truth, God will withdraw his grace and Holy Spirit from them. The gospel would raise us to the perfection of all virtue and goodness, and the promises of it are admirably fitted to relieve the infirmities and weakness of human nature, and to renew us "after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness;" to take us off from sin and vice, and to allure us to goodness, and to assist and encourage us in the practice of it: but if we will not comply with the gracious design of God in the gospel, and suffer these promises to have their due influence and efficacy upon us, we wilfully deprive ourselves of all the blessings and benefits of it; we "reject the counsel of God against ourselves," and "receive the grace of God in vain;" and, by rejecting and despising his promises, we provoke him to execute his threatenings upon us.

Thirdly and lastly, If the promises of the Christian religion are apt in their own nature to work this great effect upon us, to make us like to God, and to bring us to so near a resemblance of the Divine perfections, to make us good, and just, and merciful, and patient, and "holy in all manner of conversation, to purge us from our iniquities, and to make us a peculiar and excellent people, zealous of good works;" I say, if this be the proper tendency of the gospel, and the promises of it, how doth this upbraid the degenerate state of the Christian world at this day, which does so abound in all kind of wick-

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edness and impiety; so that we may cry out as he did, upon reading the gospel; *Profecto aut hoc non est evangelium; aut nos non sumus evangelici;* "Either this is not the gospel which we read, and the Christian religion which we profess; or we are no Christians." We are so far from that pitch of goodness and virtue which the Christian religion is apt to raise men to, and which the apostle here calls the Divine nature, that a great part of us are degenerated into beasts and devils, wallowing in abominable and filthy lusts, indulging ourselves in those devilish passions of malice and hatred, of strife and discord, of revenge and cruelty, of sedition and disturbance of the public peace, to that degree, as if the grace of God had never appeared to us to teach us the contrary. And therefore, it concerns all those who have the face to call themselves Christians, to demean themselves at another rate, and for the honour of their religion, and the salvation of their own souls, to have their "conversation as becometh the gospel of Christ;" and by departing from the vicious practices of this present evil world, to do what in them lies to prevent the judgments of God which hang over us; or if they cannot do that, to "save themselves from this untoward generation."

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SERMON XCVIII.

THE SUPPORT OF GOOD MEN UNDER THEIR SUFFERINGS FOR RELIGION.

Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.—1 PET. iv. 19.

THIS Epistle was written by St. Peter, who was the apostle of the circumcision to the dispersed Jews, who were newly converted to Christianity; and the design of it is to confirm and establish them in the profession of it; and to instruct them how they ought to demean themselves towards the heathen, or gentiles, among whom they lived; and, more particularly, to arm and prepare them for those sufferings and persecutions, which he foretels would shortly overtake them for the profession of Christianity, that, when they should happen, they might not be surprised and startled at them, as if some strange and unexpected thing were to come upon them; at the 12th verse of this chapter—"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you;" that is, do not wonder, and be not astonished at it; as if "some strange thing happened unto you."

And then he instructs them more particularly, how they ought to behave themselves under those trials and sufferings, when they should happen; not only with patience, which men ought to exer-

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cise under all kind of sufferings, upon what account and cause soever; but with joy and cheerfulness, considering the glorious example and reward of them: (ver. 13.) "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy:" and at the 14th verse he tells them, that besides the encouragement of so great an example, and so glorious a reward, they should be supported and assisted in a very extraordinary manner by the Spirit of God resting upon them in a glorious manner, as a testimony of the Divine power and presence with them: (ver. 14.) "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you;" or as it is in the best copies, "for the Spirit of glory and of power, even the Spirit of God, resteth upon you;" that is, the glorious power of the Divine Spirit is present with you, to comfort and bear up your spirits under these sufferings. But then he cautions them, to take great care that their sufferings be for a good cause, and a good conscience: (ver. 15.) "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer;" (that is, as an offender in any kind against human laws, made to preserve the peace and good order of the world:) "or as a busy-body in other men's matters;" (that is, as a pragmatical person, that meddles out of his own sphere, to the disquiet and disturbance of human society:) for to suffer upon any of these accounts, would be matter of shame and trouble, but not of joy and comfort; but if they suffered upon account of the profession of Christianity, this would be no cause of shame and reproach to them; but they ought rather to give

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God thanks for calling them to suffer in so good a cause, and upon so glorious an account: (ver. 16.) "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian (if that be his only crime) let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf; for the time is come, that judgment must begin at the house of God; (that is, the wise and just providence of God, hath so ordered it at this time, for very good reasons and ends, that the first calamities and sufferings should fall upon Christians, the peculiar people and church of God, for their trial, and a testimony to the truth of that religion, which God was now planting in the world:) and if it first begin at us (that is, at us Jews, who were the ancient people of God, and have now embraced and entertained the revelation of the gospel), what shall the end be of them, that obey not the gospel of Christ? (that is, how much more severely will God deal with the rest of the Jews who have crucified the Son of God, and still persist in their infidelity and disobedience to the gospel:) and if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" (that is, if good men be saved with so much difficulty, and must through so many tribulations "enter into the kingdom of God," what will become of all ungodly and impenitent sinners? where shall they appear? how shall they be able to stand in the judgment of the great day?) From the consideration of all which, the apostle makes this inference or conclusion, in the last verse of this chapter: "Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

Thus you see the connexion and dependence of these words upon the apostle's foregoing dis-

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course. I shall explain the several expressions in the text, and then handle the main points contained in them.

The expressions to be explained are these: what is meant by those "that suffer according to the will of God;" what by "committing the keeping of our souls to God, as unto a faithful Creator;" and what by "well-doing."

First, What is meant by "suffering according to the will of God." This may be understood of suffering in a good cause, such as God will approve; but this is not so probable, because this is mentioned afterwards, in the following expressions of "committing the keeping of our souls to God in well-doing;" that is, in suffering upon a good account: and therefore the plain and genuine sense of this expression seems to be this; that those who, according to the good pleasure of God's will, and the wise dispensation of his providence, are appointed to suffer for his cause, should demean themselves so and so: "let them that suffer according to the will of God;" that is, those whom God thinks fit to call to suffering. And this agrees very well with the like expression, (chap. iii. of this Epistle, ver. 17.) "For it is better, if the will of God be so, (that is, if God have so appointed it, and think it fit) that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing."

Secondly, What is here meant by "committing the keeping of our souls to God, as to a faithful Creator." That is, to deposit our lives, and all that belongs to us; in a word, ourselves, in the hands and custody of his merciful care and providence who made us, and therefore we may be sure will faithfully keep what we commit to him: for, as we are his creatures, he is engaged to take

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care of us, and will not abandon the work of his own hands. Besides that, he hath promised to be more especially concerned for good men; to support them in their sufferings for a good cause, and to reward them for it; "and he is faithful that hath promised."

And therefore, there is great reason and great encouragement, in all our sufferings for God's cause and truth, to commit our souls to his care and custody; our souls, that is (as I said before) our lives, and all that belongs to us; in a word, ourselves: for so the word soul is frequently used both in the Old and New Testament: (Psal. vii. 5.) "Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it;" that is, my life; for so it follows in the next words: "yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth." And, (Psal. liv. 3.) "Oppressors seek after my soul." And, (Psal. lix. 3.) "They lay in wait for my soul;" that is, my life. And, (Psal. xvi. 10.) "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;" my soul, that is, myself; thou wilt not suffer me to remain in the grave, and under the power of death, but wilt raise me up to life again. And so likewise in the New Testament: (Mark viii. 35.) "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." The same word which is here rendered *life*, in the very next verse is rendered *soul*: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" that is, his life. And so, likewise: (John xii. 25.) "He that loveth his life, shall lose it: and he that hateth his life in this world (in the original the word signifies soul), he that hateth his life in this world (that is, who neglecteth and exposeth his life in this world, for the sake of

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Christ), shall keep it unto life eternal." And, (Luke ix. 25.) that which the other evangelist renders by the word *soul*, or *life*, he renders *himself:* "For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world and lose himself?" and so here, in the text, to commit "the keeping of our souls to God," is to commit ourselves to his care and providence.

Thirdly, What is here meant by "committing ourselves to him in well-doing:" by "well-doing" is here meant, a fixed purpose and resolution of doing our duty, notwithstanding all hazards and sufferings; which is called by St. Paul, (Rom. ii. 7.) "a patient continuance in well-doing." It signifies, sometimes, acts of goodness and charity; but in this Epistle it is taken in a larger sense, for constancy and resolution in the doing of our duty; as chap. ii. 15. "For so is the will of God, that with well-doing (that is, by a resolute constancy in a good course) ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." And, (ver. 20.) "But if when ye do well, and suffer for it;" that is, if when ye "suffer for well-doing, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." And (chap. iii. ver. 6.) "As long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement;" that is, are resolute and constant in doing your duty, notwithstanding all threatenings and terrors. And, (ver. 17.) "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing;" that is, for your religion and constancy in so good a cause, as Christians, and not as criminals, upon any other account.

So that the plain meaning of the words is, as if the apostle had said—Wherefore, being forewarned of suffering and persecution for the cause of religion, the sum of my direction and advice upon the

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whole matter is this—that since it is the will of God that ye should suffer upon this account, commit yourselves, in the constant discharge of your duty, and a good conscience, to the particular care and providence of Almighty God, as your "faithful Creator."

And now I come to handle the particular points contained in the words; and they are these three:

First, That when men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, they may, with confidence, commit themselves (their lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more especial care of the Divine Providence.

Secondly, Always provided, that we do nothing contrary to our duty and a good conscience; for this the apostle means, by "committing ourselves to God, in well-doing." If we step out of the way of our duty, or do any thing contrary to it, God's providence will not be concerned for us, to bear us out in such sufferings.

Thirdly, I shall consider what ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of God, as "a faithful Creator," affords to us in all our sufferings for a good cause and a good conscience.

First, When men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion and God's truth, they may, with confidence and good assurance, commit themselves (their lives and all that is dear to them), to the particular and more especial care of his providence. In the handling of this, I shall consider these three things:

I. When men may be said to suffer really and truly for the cause of religion; and when not.

II. How far they may rely upon the providence of God, to bear them out in these sufferings.

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III. What ground and reason there is to expect the more particular and especial care of God's providence, in case of such sufferings.

I. When men may be said to suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, and God's truth; and when not. In these cases,

First, When men suffer for not renouncing the true religion, and because they will not openly declare against it, and apostatize from it. But it will be said that, in all these cases, the question is—What is the true religion? to which I answer; that all discourses of this nature, about suffering for religion, do suppose the truth of some religion or other. And, among Christians, the truth of the Christian religion is taken for granted, wherever we speak of men's suffering persecution for it. And the plainest case among Christians is, when they are persecuted, because they will not openly deny and renounce the Christian religion. And this was generally the case of the primitive Christians; they were threatened with tortures and death, because they would not renounce Jesus Christ and his religion, and give demonstration thereof, by offering sacrifices to the heathen gods.

Secondly, Men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they are persecuted only for making an open profession of the Christian religion, by joining in the assemblies of Christians for the worship of God; though they be not urged to deny and disclaim it, but only to conceal and dissemble the profession of it, so as to forbear the maintenance and defence of it upon fitting occasions, against the objections of those who are adversaries of it. For to conceal the profession of it, and to decline the defence of it when just occasion is offered, is to be

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ashamed of it, which our Saviour interprets to be a kind of denial of it, and is opposed to the confessing of him before men: (Matt. x. 32, 33.) "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." And this, by St. Mark, is expressed by being ashamed of Christ; that is, afraid and ashamed to make an open profession of him and his religion; (Mark viii. 38.) "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."

And this, likewise, was the case of the primitive Christians under the moderate emperors, when the persecution of them was not so hot as to drive them to a denial of Christ, provided they would be contented to conceal and dissemble their religion; in that case they did not hunt them out, nor prosecute them to renounce their religion, if they made no discovery of themselves. But yet, they who suffered, because they would not conceal their profession of Christianity, did truly suffer for the cause of religion.

Thirdly, Men do likewise truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer for not betraying it by any indirect and unworthy means; such as among the primitive Christians was the delivering up their Bibles to the heathen, to be burnt and destroyed by them: for to give up that holy Book, which is the great instrument of our religion, is, in effect, to give up Christianity itself, and consent to the utter extirpation of it.

And such, likewise, is the case of those who suf-

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fer in any kind for not contributing to break down the fences of religion in any nation, where the providence of God hath given it a legal establishment and security; or, in a word, for refusing to countenance and further any design which visibly tends to the ruin of religion: for to destroy religion, and to take away that which hinders the destruction of it, are, in effect, much the same thing.

Fourthly, Men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer for the maintenance and defence of any necessary and fundamental article of it, though they be not required to renounce the whole Christian religion; for what St. Paul says of the article of the resurrection of the dead, is true of any other necessary article of the Christian religion, that the denial of it is a subversion of the whole Christian faith; because it tends directly to the overthrowing of Christianity, being a wound given to it in a vital and essential part. And this was the case of those who, in any age of Christianity, have been persecuted by the heretics, for the defence of any article of Christianity.

And I cannot but observe, by the way, that, after the heathen persecutions were ceased, persecution was first begun among the Christians by heretics; and hath since been taken up, and carried much beyond that bad pattern, by the church of Rome; which, besides a standing inquisition in all countries, which are entirely of that religion (a court, the like whereto, for the clancular and secret manner of proceeding, for the unjust and arbitrary rules of it, for the barbarous usage of men's persons, and the cruelty of its torments, to extort confessions from them, the sun never saw erected under any government in the world, by men of any religion

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whatsoever); I say, which, besides this court, hath by frequent croisadoes for the extirpation of heretics, and by many bloody-massacres in France and Ireland, and several other places, destroyed far greater numbers of Christians, than all the ten heathen persecutions; and hath of late revived, and to this very day continues the same or greater cruelties, and a fiercer persecution of protestants, if all the circumstances of it be considered, than was ever yet practised upon them; and yet whilst this is doing almost before our eyes, in one of our next neighbour nations, they have the face to complain of the cannibal laws and bloody persecutions of the church of England, and the confidence to set up for the great patrons of liberty of conscience, and enemies of all compulsion and force, in matters of religion.

Fifthly, Men do truly suffer for the cause of God and religion, when they suffer for asserting and maintaining the purity of the Christian doctrine and worship; and for opposing and not complying with those gross errors and corruptions, which superstition and ignorance had, in a long course of time, brought into the Christian religion. Upon this account many good people suffered, in many past ages, for resisting the growing errors and corruptions of the church of Rome; which at first crept in by degrees, but at last broke in like a mighty flood, which carried down all before it, and threatened ruin and destruction to all that opposed them. Upon this account, also, infinite numbers suffered among the Waldenses and Albigenses, in Bohemia, and in England, and in most other countries in this western part of Christendom. And they who suffered, upon this account, suffered in a good cause, and for the testimony of the truth.

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Sixthly and lastly, Men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer for not disclaiming and renouncing any clear and undoubted truth of God whatsoever; yea, though it be not a fundamental point and article of religion.

And this is the case of those many thousands, who ever since the fourth council of Lateran, which was in the year 1215 (when transubstantiation was first defined to be an article of faith, and necessary to salvation to be believed), were persecuted with fire and sword, for not understanding those words of our Saviour, "this is my body" (which are so easily capable of a reasonable sense), in the absurd and impossible sense of transubstantiation. And though this disowning of this doctrine, be no express and direct article of the Christian religion, yet it is a fundamental article of right reason and common sense: because the admitting of transubstantiation, does undermine the foundation of all certainty whatsoever, and does more immediately shake the very foundation of Christianity itself. Yea, though the Christian religion were no ways concerned in this doctrine, yet out of reverence to reason and truth, and a just animosity and indignation at confident nonsense, a man of an honest and generous mind, would as soon be brought to declare or swear, that twice two do not make four, but five, as to profess his belief of transubstantiation.

And though all truths are not of equal consequence and concernment, yet all truth is of God; and, for that reason, though we are not obliged to make an open profession of all truths, at all times, yet we are bound not to deny or renounce any truth, nor to make profession of a known falsehood or error: for it is merely because of the intrinsical evil

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of the thing, that it is impossible for God to lie; and the Son of God thought it worth his coming into the world, and laying down his life, to bear witness to the truth. So he himself tells us, (John xviii. 37.) "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."

Thus I have shewn you in these plain instances (to which most other cases may be reduced), when men may be said to suffer truly for the cause of religion and truth.

I shall mention two or three cases wherein men may seem to suffer for the cause of religion, but cannot truly be said to do so.

First, When men rashly expose themselves to danger, and run upon sufferings for the sake of religion. Thus several of the primitive Christians voluntarily exposed themselves when they were not called in question, and in the heat of their affection and zeal for God and religion, offered themselves to martyrdom, when none inquired after them. This, in the gracious interpretation of God, who, knowing the sincerity of their zeal, was pleased to overlook the indiscreet forwardness and rashness of it, might be accepted for a kind of martyrdom; but cannot in reason be justified, so as to be fit to be made a pattern, and to be recommended to our imitation. For though God may be pleased to excuse the weakness of a well-meaning zeal, yet he can approve nothing but what is reasonable.

To suffer cheerfully for the cause of God and his truth, when he calls us to fight this good fight of faith, and to "resist unto blood;" and when we are reduced to that strait, that we must either die for God and his truth, or deny them; to suffer, I say, in this

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case with courage and patience, is one of the noblest of all the Christian virtues. But to be perfect volunteers, and to run ourselves upon sufferings, when we are not called to them, looks rather like the sacrifice of fools; which though God may mercifully excuse, and pardon the evil of the action, for the good meaning of it; yet he can never perfectly approve and accept of it. But I think there is little need now-a-days to caution men against this rashness; it is well if they have the grace and resolution to suffer when it is their duty, and when they are called to it.

Secondly, Nor can men be truly said to suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer not for their faith, but their fancy, and for the wilful and affected error of a mistaken conscience. As when men suffer for indifferent things, which, in heat and passion, they call superstition and idolatry; and for their own false opinions in religion, which they mistake for fundamental articles of the Christian faith. In this case, their mistake about these things will not change the nature of them, nor turn their sufferings into martyrdom: and yet many men have certainly suffered for their own mistakes. For as men may be so far deluded, as to think they do God good service when they kill his faithful servants; so likewise may they be so far deceived, as to sacrifice their lives, and all that is dear to them, to their own culpable errors and mistakes. But this is zeal without knowledge, not "the wisdom which descends from above," but that which comes from beneath, and is like the fire of hell, which is heat without light.

Thirdly and lastly, Nor can men truly be said to suffer from the cause of God and religion, when they suffer for the open profession and defence of truths not necessary. For though a man be obliged

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to make an open profession of all fundamental and necessary truths; yet he is under no such obligation to make profession of truths not necessary at all times; and, unless he be called to deny them, he is not bound either to declare or defend them; he may hold his peace, at other times, and be silent about them, especially when the open profession of them will probably do no good to others, and will certainly do hurt to ourselves; and the zealous endeavour to propagate such truths will be to the greater prejudice of charity, and the disturbance of the public peace of the church.

It was a good saying of Erasmus (if we understand it as, I believe, he meant it, of truths not necessary) *Adeo invisæ sunt mihi discordiæ, ut veritas etiam contentiosa displiceat:* "I am (says he) so perfect a hater of discord, that I am even displeased with truth, when it is the occasion of contention." As a man is never to deny truth, so neither is he obliged to make an open profession of truths not necessary at all times; and if he suffer upon that account, he cannot justify it to his own prudence, nor have comfort in such sufferings, because he brings them needlessly upon himself; and no man can have comfort, but in suffering for doing his duty.

And thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to inquire into; namely, when men may be truly said to suffer for the cause of religion.

I proceed now to the

Second inquiry; namely, how far men may rely upon the providence of God to bear them out in such sufferings?

To which I answer: that provided we do what becomes us, and is our duty on our part, the providence of God will not be wanting on his part, to

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bear us out in all our sufferings for his cause, one of these three ways.

First, To secure us from that violent degree of temptation and suffering, which would be too strong for human strength and patience; or,

Secondly, In case of such extraordinary temptation and trial, to give us the extraordinary supports and comforts of his Holy Spirit; or else,

Thirdly, In case of a temporary fall and miscarriage, to raise us up by repentance, and a greater resolution and constancy under sufferings. I shall speak severally to these.

First, Either the providence of God will not be wanting to secure us from that violent degree of temptation and suffering, which would be too strong for human strength and patience to bear. And this is a great security to good men, against the fears of final miscarriage, after all their labours, and pains, and sufferings in a religious course, by being overborne at last by the assault of a very violent and powerful temptation. Not but that the best of men ought always to have a prudent distrust of themselves, so as to keep them from security; according to the apostle's caution and counsel: "be not high-minded, but fear; and let him that stands, take heed lest he fall;" because, till we come to heaven, we shall never be out of the danger and possibility of falling; but yet, for all this, we may hope, by the sincerity and firmness of our resolution, under the usual influences of God's grace, to acquit ourselves like men, in ordinary cases of temptation and suffering.

And, to this end, we should represent to ourselves those "exceeding great and precious promises" which he hath made to good men, and his merciful providence, which continually watcheth over them, and

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steers their course for them in this world, among those many rocks which they are in danger to split upon; that he is able to stablish us in the truth, and to keep us from falling; "to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom;" and that, if we do not forsake him, and forfeit his care and protection, he will "keep us by his mighty power through faith unto salvation;" either by his merciful foresight and prevention of those temptations which would, probably, be too hard for us; or, if he thinks fit they should befal us, by supporting us under them in an extraordinary manner.

For I doubt not but that the best men do owe their security and perseverance in goodness, much more to the merciful providence of God, preventing the assaults of violent and dangerous temptations, than to the firmness and constancy of their own resolutions. For there are very few persons of so firm and resolute virtue, but that one time or other a temptation might assault them upon such a disadvantage, as would, in all probability, not only stagger them, but bear them down. Now herein the providence of God towards good men is very remarkable, in securing them from those temptations which are too strong for them to grapple withal; like a kind and tender father, who, if he be satisfied of the dutiful disposition of his child towards him, will not try his obedience to the utmost, nor permit too strong a temptation to the contrary to come in his way. So the Psalmist represents God's tender regard and consideration of the frailty and infirmity of his children: (Psal. ciii. 13, 14.) "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth

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that we are but dust;" that is, he considereth us as men, and deals with us accordingly. Provided we be sincere, he will not suffer us to be set upon by temptations that are too big for us. And therefore our blessed Saviour makes it one of the petitions of that excellent prayer, which he hath recommended to us; "Lead us not into temptation;" that is, we should every day beg of God, that his providence would keep us out of the way of great and dangerous temptations, as knowing that this will be a greater security to us, than any strength and resolution of our own.

Secondly, Or in case of such violent and extraordinary temptations, the providence of God will not be wanting to give us the extraordinary support and comfort of his Holy Spirit, to bear us up under them. The providence of God did take care of good men in all ages, and did afford comfort to them under great trials and sufferings; but God never made so express and general a promise of this to all good men, as he hath done by the Christian religion. Never was so constant a presence and influence of the Divine Spirit vouchsafed and assured to men, under any dispensation, as that of the gospel; wherein the Spirit of God is promised to all that sincerely embrace the Christian religion, to reside and dwell in them; not only to all the purposes of sanctification and holiness, but of support and comfort under the heaviest pressures and sufferings. For which reason the gospel is called the ministration of the Spirit; and is, upon this account, said to be more glorious than any other revelation which God had ever made to mankind.

We are naturally apt to be very much disheartened and cast down at the apprehension of great

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sufferings, from the consideration of our own weakness and frailty; but the Spirit of Christ dwells in all true Christians, and the same glorious power, which raised up Jesus from the dead, works mightily in them that believe. St. Paul useth very high expressions about this matter: (Eph. i. 19.) "That ye may know, (saith he, speaking to all Christians) what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand." So that every Christian is endowed with a kind of omnipotence, being able (as St. Paul speaks of himself) to do and to endure all things, "through Christ strengthening him." Of ourselves we are very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world are very powerful; but there is a principle residing in every true Christian that is able to bear us up against the world, and the power of all its temptations. "Whatsoever is born of God (saith St. John) overcometh the world; for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The Holy Spirit of God, which dwells in all true Christians, is a more powerful principle of resolution, and courage, and patience, under the sharpest trials and sufferings, than the evil spirit which rules in the world is, to stir up and set on the malice and rage of the world against us. "Ye are of God, little children;" he speaks this to the youngest and weakest Christians. "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The malice and power of the devil is very great; but the goodness and power of God is greater. And therefore, in case of extraordinary temptation, good men, by virtue of this

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promise of God's Holy Spirit, may expect to be borne up and comforted in a very extraordinary and supernatural manner, under the greatest tribulations and sufferings for righteousness' sake.

And this was in a very signal and remarkable manner afforded to the primitive Christians, under those fierce and cruel persecutions to which they were exposed. And this may still be expected, in like cases of extraordinary sufferings, for the testimony of God's truth. "If ye be reproached (saith St. Peter in this 4th chap. ver. 14.) for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." The Spirit of God is here promised to strengthen and support all that suffer for the name of Christ, in a very conspicuous and glorious manner, according to that prayer of St. Paul, (Colossians i. 11.) that Christians might be "strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness." For when God is pleased to exercise good men with trials more than human, and such sufferings as are beyond the common rate of human strength and patience to bear, he hath engaged himself to endue and assist them with more than human courage and resolution. So St. Paul tells the Corinthians, who had not then felt the utmost rage of persecution: (1 Cor. x. 13.) "No temptation or trial hath yet befallen you but what is common to man;" that is, nothing but what is frequently incident to human nature, and what by human strength, with an ordinary assistance of God's grace, may be grappled withal. But, in case God shall call you to extraordinary sufferings, "he is faithful that hath promised, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will

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with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it;" that is, as he hath ordered and appointed so great a temptation or trial to befal you, so he will take care that it shall have a happy issue, by enabling you to bear it, by affording you grace and strength equal to the violence and power of the temptation. For as he is said to fall into temptation, that is conquered by it; so he is said to get out of it, or escape it, who is enabled to bear it, and in so doing gets the better of it. And for this we may rely upon the faithfulness of God, who hath promised that we shall not be tried above our strength, either not above the strength which we have, or not above the strength which he will afford us in such a case.

And why then should we be daunted at the apprehension of any suffering whatsoever, if we be secured that our comfort shall be increased in proportion to our trouble, and our strength in proportion to the sharpness and weight of our sufferings? or else,

Thirdly, In case of temporary falling, the providence and goodness of God will give them the grace and opportunity of recovering themselves from their fall by repentance. For the providence of God may sometimes, for wise ends and reasons, see it fit to leave good men to their own frailty, and to faint and fall shamefully under sufferings, so as to renounce and deny the truth: sometimes to punish their vain confidence in themselves, as in the case of Peter, who declared more resolution, and bore it out with a greater confidence tha any of the disciples, when he said to our Saviour, "though all men forsake thee, yet will not I;" and yet after this he fell more shamefully than any of the rest, so as to deny his Master with hor-

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rid oaths and imprecations; and this, though our Saviour had prayed particularly for him, "that his faith might not fail." From which instance we may learn, that God doth not engage himself absolutely to secure good men from falling, in case of a great temptation and trial; but if they be sincere, he will not permit them to fall finally, though he may suffer them to miscarry grievously for a time, to convince them of the vanity of their confidence in themselves and their own strength.

Sometimes God may suffer good men to fall, in order to their more glorious recovery, and the greater demonstration and triumph of their faith and constancy afterwards; which was the case of that happy instrument of our Reformation here in England, Archbishop Cranmer; who, after he had been so great a champion of the Reformation, was so overcome with fear, upon the apprehension of his approaching sufferings, as to subscribe those errors of the church of Rome, which he had so stoutly opposed a great part of his life: but he did not long continue in this state, but by the grace of God, which had not forsaken him, was brought to repentance; and when he came to suffer, gave such a testimony of it, and of his faith and constancy, as was more glorious, and more to the confirmation of the faith of others, than a simple martyrdom could have been, if he had not fallen; for when he was brought to the stake, he put his right hand (with which he had signed the recantation) into the fire, and with an undaunted constancy held it there, till it was quite burnt, for a testimony of his true repentance for that foul miscarriage; and when he had done, gave the rest of his body to be burnt, which he endured with great courage and cheerful-

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ness to the last. So that he made all the amends possible for so great a fault; and the goodness of God, and the power of his grace, was more glorified in his repentance and recovery than if he had never fallen.

But what shall we say when, notwithstanding these promises of extraordinary comfort and support, in case of extraordinary sufferings, so great numbers are seen to faint in the day of trial, and to fall off from their steadfastness? Of which there were many sad instances among the primitive Christians; and have likewise been, of late, in our own times, and in places nearer to us. This, I confess, is a very melancholy consideration; but yet, I think, is capable of a sufficient answer.

And, first of all, let this be established for a firm and undoubted principle, that God is faithful to his promise; and therefore we ought much rather to suppose, in all these cases, that there is some default on our part, than any failure and unfaithfulness on God's part. Thus St. Paul determines, in a like case, when the promise of God seemed not to be made good to the Jews, he lays the blame of it on their unbelief, but acquits God of any unfaithfulness in his promise: (Rom. iii. 3, 4.) "For what if some did not believe, shall their unbelief make the faith (or fidelity) of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar." This, I confess, does not answer the difficulty; but yet it ought to incline and dispose us to interpret what can fairly be offered for the removal of it, with all the favour that may be on God's side. I say, then,

Secondly, That when good men fall, in case of extraordinary temptation, and recover again by repentance, and give greater demonstration, after-

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wards, of their constancy and resolution in the cause of God and his truth, the faithfulness of God, in his promises, is sufficiently vindicated, as in the cases I mentioned; because the promise of God is not absolute that good men shall be preserved from falling; but that the temptation shall have a happy issue, and that they shall not finally miscarry. For promises of this nature are to be interpreted by us, and understood as we do our Saviour's prayer for Peter before his fall, that his faith should not fail finally; but though he fell through too much confidence in himself, he should, through the grace of God assisting him, be enabled to recover by repentance.

Thirdly, The sincerity or insincerity of men, in the profession of the true religion, is a thing which we cannot certainly know, because we do not see into men's hearts; but He, who knows the heart, and tries the spirits of men in a balance, cannot be deceived in this matter; and where men are not sincere, the promise of God is not concerned to hinder them from discovering themselves; and the fall of such persons is no reflection upon the faithfulness of God. And it is reasonable enough to presume, that this may be the case of not a few; and that (like Simon Magus), after they have made a very solemn profession of Christianity, their hearts may not be right in the sight of God.

Fourthly, If we put the case at the hardest, that some that were very sincere, after they have held out a great while, under the extremity of torments, have at last fainted under them, and yielded to the malice and cruelty of their persecutors; and, in this amazement and distraction, have not long after expired, without any testimony of their repentance: in

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this case, both reason and charity ought to restrain us from passing any very positive and severe sentence upon the state of such persons. For what do we know, but God, whose goodness will certainly make all the allowance to human frailty that reason can require (for he knows whereof we are made, and "remembers that we are but dust;" he mercifully considers every man's case, and weighs all the circumstances of it in an exact balance); I say, who can tell, but that, in such a case as I have mentioned, God may graciously be pleased to accept such a degree of constant suffering of great torments, for so long a time, for a true martyrdom, and not expect a more than human patience and resolution, where he is not pleased to afford more than human strength and support; and whether he may not look upon their failing and miscarriage, at last, in the same rank with the indeliberate actions of men in a frenzy, and beside themselves.

And thus, God may be said, "with the temptation to make a way to escape," or to give a happy issue to it; since they were enabled to bear it, till, being distracted by their torments, their understandings were thrown off the hinges, and incapable of exercising any deliberate acts of reason. And, without some such equitable consideration of the case of such persons, it will be very hard to reconcile some appearances of things with the goodness of God and the faithfulness of his promise.

However, it will become us to abstain from all uncharitableness and peremptory censure of the final estate of such persons, especially till we ourselves have given greater and better testimony of our constancy; and, in the mean time, to leave them to the

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righteous and merciful sentence of their Master and ours, to whose judgment we must all stand or fall.

I am sure it will very ill become those, who, by the providence of God, have escaped those sufferings, and are at present out of danger themselves, to sit in judgment upon those who are left to endure this terrible conflict; and have, perhaps, held out as long or longer than they themselves would have done in the like circumstances. Let us rather earnestly beg of the God of all grace and patience, that he would endue us with a greater measure of patience and constancy, if he see fit to call us to the exercise of it, and (which we lawfully may, after the example of our blessed Saviour) that, if it be his will, he would "let this cup pass from us," and not try us with the like sufferings, "lest we also be weary, and faint in our minds." I come now to the

III. Third and last inquiry which I proposed: What ground and reason there is for good men to expect the more peculiar and especial care of God's providence in case of such sufferings.

The providence of God extends to all his creatures, according to that of the psalmist: "the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." But he exerciseth a more peculiar providence towards mankind; and more peculiar yet towards those who study to please him by obeying his laws and doing his will. He that is assured of his own heart that he loves God, and would do or suffer any thing for him, can have no cause to doubt but that God loves him, and is concerned for his happiness. No man was ever afraid of God that was not conscious to himself that he had offended him, and, by the wilful breach of his laws, had put

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himself out of the care of his providence. But, on the contrary, if our hearts give us this testimony, that we have made it our sincere endeavour to please him, we are naturally apt to have good assurance and confidence of his favour and good-will towards us. This comfort the mind of every good man is apt to give him, from his own reason, and the natural notions which he hath of God.

But, to free us from all doubt in this matter, God himself hath told us so, and given us plentiful assurance of it in his word: (Psal. xi. 7.) "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright;" that is, he will be favourable unto them: (Psal. xxxiii. 18.) "Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy." The eye of God signifies his watchful care and providence over good men. So that, besides the sure and well-grounded reasonings from the essential perfections of the Divine nature, the mercy and goodness of God, "we have a more sure word" of promise in the express declarations of God's word, and more particularly in the case of great temptations and sufferings. For can we think that the Scripture saith in vain, "Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart? Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all? The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways: though he fall, he shall not utterly be cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand? The salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord; he is their help in time of trouble?" The same promises we find in the New Testament: "All things shall work together for good to them that love God. God is

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faithful, who hath promised that he will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape." And, to mention no more, "Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering; he is faithful that hath promised;" viz. to support you under sufferings, and to reward them.

Thus much for the first point; namely, that when men do suffer truly for the cause of religion, they may, with confidence, commit themselves to the more peculiar care of the Divine Providence.

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SERMON XCIX.

THE SUPPORT OF GOOD MEN UNDER THEIR SUFFERINGS FOR RELIGION.

Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.—1 PET. iv. 19.

FROM these words I proposed to consider these three points:

First, That when men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, they may, with confidence, commit themselves (their lives, and all that is dear to them) to the peculiar and more especial care of the Divine Providence.

Secondly, This we may do, always, provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid sufferings, nor to rescue ourselves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty and a good conscience; for this is the meaning of committing ourselves to God in well-doing.

Thirdly, To shew what ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of God, under the notion of "a faithful Creator," does afford to us, under all our sufferings for a good cause and a good conscience.

The first of these points I have treated on, at large, in my former discourse; I proceed now to the

Second, namely, When, in all our sufferings for the cause of religion, we may, with confidence and

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good assurance, commit ourselves to the peculiar and more especial care of God's providence: this is to be understood, always provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid sufferings, nor to rescue ourselves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty and a good conscience. And this, I told you, was the meaning of committing ourselves to God in well-doing: for if we either neglect our duty, or step out of the way of it by doing things contrary to it, the providence of God will not be concerned to bear us out in such sufferings. So that in our sufferings for the cause of God and religion, to commit ourselves to him in well-doing, may reasonably comprehend in it these following particulars:

1. Provided always, that we neglect no lawful means of our preservation from sufferings, or our deliverance out of them: in this case, men do not commit themselves to the providence of God, but cast themselves out of his care and protection; they do not trust God, but tempt him, and do, as it were, try whether he will stand by us when we desert ourselves, and bring us out of trouble when we would take no care, would use no endeavours to prevent it. If we will needlessly provoke trouble, and run ourselves upon sufferings; if we will neglect ourselves, and the lawful means of our preservation; if we will give up, and part with those securities of our religion which the providence of God and the laws of our country have given us; if we ourselves will help to pull down the fence which is about us; if we will disarm ourselves, and by our own act expose ourselves naked and open to danger and sufferings; why should we think, in this case, that God

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will help us, when we would not help ourselves by those lawful ways which the providence of God hath put into our hands?

All trust in God, and dependance upon his providence, does imply that we join prayer and endeavour together; faith in God, and a prudent and diligent use of the means: if we lazily trust the providence of God, and so cast all our care upon him, as to take none at all ourselves, God will take no care of us. In vain do we rely upon the wisdom, and goodness, and power of God; in vain do we importune and tire Heaven with our prayers to help us against our enemies and persecutors, if we ourselves will do nothing for ourselves; in vain do we hope that God will maintain and defend our religion against all the secret contrivances and open assaults of our enemies, if we, who are united in the profession of the same religion, and in all the essentials of faith and worship, will for some small differences in lesser matters, which are of no moment, in comparison of the things wherein we are agreed: I say, if for such slight matters we will divide and fall out among ourselves; if, when the enemy is at the gates, we will still pursue our heats and animosities, and will madly keep open those breaches which were foolishly made at first, what can we expect, but that the common enemy should take the advantage and enter in at them; and, whilst we are so unseasonably and senselessly contending with one another, that they should take the opportunity which we give them to destroy us all.

2. Provided, likewise, that we do not attempt our own preservation or deliverance from suffering, by evil and unlawful means: we must do nothing that is contrary to our duty and to a good conscience,

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nor comply with any thing, or lend a helping hand thereto, that apparently tends to the ruin of our religion, neither to divert nor put off sufferings for the present, nor to rescue ourselves from under them; because we cannot with confidence commit ourselves to the providence of God, but in well-doing.

This is an eternal rule, from whence we must in no case depart: that men must do nothing contrary to the rules and precepts of religion, no, not for the sake of religion itself: we must not break any law of God, nor disobey the lawful commands of lawful authority, to free ourselves from any sufferings whatsoever; because the goodness of no end can sanctify evil means and make them lawful: we must not speak deceitfully for God, nor lie, no, not for the truth; nor kill men, though we could thereby do God and religion the greatest service. And though all the casuists in the world should teach the contrary doctrine (as they generally do in the church of Rome), yet I would not doubt to oppose to all those the single authority of St. Paul, who expressly condemns this principle, and brands it for a damnable doctrine—that evil may be done by us that good may come. (Rom. iii. 8.) "And not as we be slanderously reported, and, as some affirm, that we say, Let us do evil that good may come, whose damnation is just." St. Paul, it seems, looked upon it as a most devilish calumny to insinuate that the Christian religion gives the least countenance to such damnable doctrines and doings as these; and pronounceth their damnation to be just, who either teach any such principle, as the doctrine of Christianity, or practise according to it.

Let those look to it, who teach that a right intention and a good end will render things, which are

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otherwise evil and unlawful, not only lawful to be done by us, but in many cases meritorious; especially where the good of the church and the extirpation of heresy are more immediately concerned. Of this nature are the doctrines of equivocation and mental reservation, and the lawfulness of such artificial ways of lying to avoid the danger of the law, when they are brought before heretical magistrates; and this is the common doctrine of the most learned casuists of all orders in the church of Rome: and such, likewise, are their doctrines of the lawfulness of extirpating heretics by the most barbarous and bloody means, and of breaking faith with them, though given by emperors and princes in the most public and solemn manner: both which are the avowed doctrines of their general councils, and have frequently been put in practice, to the destruction of many millions of Christians, better and more righteous than themselves. But we "have not so learned Christ," who have heard him, and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus. They, who are rightly instructed in the Christian religion, are so far from thinking it lawful to do any thing that is evil to bring others under suffering, that they do not allow it in any case whatsoever; no, not for the cause of God and religion, and to free themselves from the greatest sufferings that can be inflicted upon them.

3. Provided, also, that we do trust the providence of God, and do indeed commit ourselves to it; relying upon his wisdom and goodness, and entirely submitting and resigning up ourselves to his will and disposal, both as to the degree and the duration of our sufferings; believing that he will do that for us which, upon the whole matter, and in the final issue

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and result of things, will be best for us. That blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the people of Israel before his death, doth belong to all good men in all ages: "He loveth his people, and all his saints are in his hand." (Deut. xxxiii. 3.) Innumerable are the promises in Scripture concerning the merciful providence and goodness of God towards those who trust in him, and "hope in his mercy." (Psal. xxxii. 10.) "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." (Psal. xxxiii. 18—22.) "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy: to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in him: because we have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee." (Psal. xxxiv. 22.) "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants, and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate." (Psal. xxxvii. 39, 40.) "But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them because they trust in him." (Psal. xxxi. 19.) "O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men." (Psal. lv. 22.) "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psal. cxxv. i.) "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." (Isa. xxvi. 3, 4.) "Thou wilt

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keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

4. Provided yet further, that we pray earnestly to God for his gracious help and assistance, for his merciful comfort and support under sufferings; that he would be pleased to strengthen our faith, and to increase and lengthen out our patience, in proportion to the degree and duration of our sufferings.

All the promises which God hath made to us are upon this condition, that we earnestly seek and sue to him for the benefit and blessing of them. (Psal. l. 15.) "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Ezek. xxxvi. 37.) After a great deliverance, and many blessings promised to them, this condition is at last added, "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." And this, likewise, is the tenor of the promises of the New Testament: (Matt. vii. 7.) "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And in this very case that I am speaking of, God expects that we should apply ourselves to him for spiritual wisdom and grace, to behave ourselves under sufferings as we ought: Jam. i. 2, 3, 4. Where speaking of the manifold temptations the Christians would be exercised withal, he directs them to pray to God for wisdom to demean themselves under persecutions, with patience, and constancy, and cheerfulness. "My brethren, account it all joy, when you fall into divers temptations; (meaning the temptations and trials of suffering in several kinds) knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience.

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But let patience have its perfect work." And because this is a very difficult duty, and requires a great deal of spiritual skill, to demean ourselves under sufferings as we ought, therefore he adds in the next words, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

And this earnest application we are to make to God, for his grace and seasonable help in time of need; not to put him in mind of his promise, but to testify our dependance upon him, and expectation of all good from him. And we must likewise use great importunity in our prayers to God, to assist us and stand by us in the day of trial, and the hour of temptation. And therefore our Saviour heaps up several words, to denote the great earnestness and importunity which we ought to use in prayer, bidding us to ask, and seek, and knock. And, to shew that he lays more than ordinary weight upon this matter, and to encourage our importunity, he spake two several parables to this purpose: the first, (Luke xi. 5.) of the man who by mere importunity prevailed with his friend to rise at midnight to do him a kindness, which our Saviour applies to encourage our importunity in prayer: (ver. 9.) "And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The other is the parable of the importunate widow and unjust judge, related by the same evangelist, (Luke xviii. 1.) with this preface to it; and "he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." And, to speak the truth, they seem, at first sight, two of the oddest of all our Saviour's parables; as if the design of them were to insinuate to us, that God is to be prevailed upon by

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the mere importunity of our prayers to grant our requests: but our blessed Saviour, who best knew his own meaning, tells us, that all that he designed by it, was only to signify, that we "ought always to pray, and not to faint;" that is, to "continue instant in prayer," and not to give over after once asking, as if we despaired of prevailing. Not that mere importunity prevails with God to give us those things which he is otherwise unwilling to grant; but because it becomes us to be fervent, and earnest, to testify our faith and confidence in the goodness of God, and the deep sense we have of our own weakness, and wants, and unworthiness; and, likewise, that we set a true value upon the blessings and favours of God, as worth all the earnestness and importunity we can use: and, in this decent and sober sense, the success of our prayers may truly be said to depend upon our importunity; not that it is necessary to move God to grant our requests, but that it becomes us to be thus affected, that we may be the more fitly qualified for the grace and mercy which God is willing to confer upon us.

I have been the longer upon this, to give us a right notion of this matter, and that we may the more distinctly understand the true reason why our Saviour does require so much earnestness and importunity of prayer on our part; not at all to work upon God, and to dispose him to shew mercy to us (for that he is always inclinable to, whenever we are fit for it), but only to dispose and qualify us to receive the grace and mercy of God with greater advantage to ourselves.

5. Provided, moreover, that we be not confident of ourselves, and of the force and strength of our resolution. We know not ourselves, nor the frailty and weakness of our own resolution, till we are tried. It

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is wise advice which Solomon gives us, and never more seasonable than in the day of trial: (Prov. iii. 5, 6, 7.) "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths; be not wise in thine own eyes;" that is, be not conceited and confident of thine own wisdom and strength, or ability in any kind; there is a secret providence of God, which mingles itself with the actions and spirits of men, and disposeth of us unknown to ourselves; and what we think to be the effect of our own strength and resolution, of our own wisdom and contrivance, proceeds from a higher cause, which, unseen to us, does steer and govern us. So the wise man observes: (Prov. xx. 24.) "Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a man then understand his own ways?" And therefore we have reason every one to say with the prophet: (Jer. x. 23.) "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Our feet will soon slip, if God do not uphold us by his hand. Remember how shamefully the chief of our Lord's disciples miscarried, by too much confidence in himself—I mean St. Peter; in whose fall we may all see our own frailty: if God do but permit the devil to have the winnowing of us, there will be a great deal of chaff found in the best of us. What St. Paul said of himself, (2 Cor. xii. 10.) "When I am weak, then am I strong;" we shall all find true, when it comes to the trial: we are then strongest, when, in a just sense of our own weakness, we rely most upon the strength and power of God.

6. Provided furthermore, that, according to our ability, we have been much in the exercise of alms and charity. For well-doing, or doing good, is some-

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times taken in a narrower sense, not improper here to be mentioned, though perhaps not so particularly intended here in the text for works of charity and alms. As, (Heb. xiii. 16.) "But to do good, and to communicate (that is, to the necessities of the poor) forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." This kind of well-doing is a special preservative in times of evil; there is no kind of grace or virtue to which there are in Scripture more special promises made, of our protection and preservation from evil and suffering, of support and comfort under them, and deliverance out of them, than to this of a charitable and compassionate consideration of those who labour under want or suffering. (Psal. xxxvii. 3.) "Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed:" and (ver. 19.) speaking of righteous or merciful men, "they shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied." (Psal. xli. 1, 2.) "Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies."

There are, likewise, in the apocryphal books, excellent sayings for the encouragement of charity, as that which will be particularly considered and rewarded to us in the times of danger and distress, in the days of affliction and suffering. (Tob. iv. 7—10.) "Give alms of thy substance, and turn not thy face from any poor man, and the face of God shall not be turned away from thee; if thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly; if thou hast but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little, for thou layest up for thyself a good treasure against the day

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of necessity, because that alms do deliver from death, and suffereth not to come into darkness." (Ecclus. iii. 31.) Speaking of him that gives alms, and is ready to do kindness to others: "He is mindful of that which may come hereafter; and when he falleth he shall find a stay." And, (chap. xxix. 11, 12, 13.) "Lay up thy treasure according to the commandment of the Most High, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold; shut up alms in thy store-houses, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction; it shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield and strong spear."

I have often said it, and am verily persuaded of it, that one of the best signs of God's mercy and favour to this poor nation is, that God hath been pleased, of late years, to stir up so general a disposition in men to works of alms and charity, and thereby to revive the primitive spirit of Christianity, which so eminently abounded in this grace, and taught those who believed in God to be "careful to maintain and practise good works." And nothing gives me greater hopes that God hath mercy still in store for us, than that men are so ready to shew mercy: there are great objects to exercise our charity upon in this time of the general suspension of trade and business, from an apprehension of approaching troubles; by reason whereof, both the numbers and necessities of our poor are greatly and daily increased among us; and, besides, the poor of our own nation, God has sent us great numbers from abroad, I mean those who are fled hither for shelter from that violent storm of persecution which hath lately fallen upon them for the cause of our common religion. According to the compassion we shew to them, we may expect that God will

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either preserve us from the like sufferings, or graciously support us under them. What do we know but that God is now trying us, and hath purposely put this opportunity into our hands of preventing, or mitigating, or shortening, our own sufferings, according as we extend our charity and pity to those who have suffered so deeply for the cause of God and his truth?

7. Provided, in the last place, and above all, that we be sincere in our religion, and endeavour to be universally good, and "holy in all manner of conversation," and "to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God." This is the largest sense of well-doing, and the most necessary of all the rest, to prepare us for sufferings, and to give us courage and constancy under them; and likewise to engage the providence of God to a tender care of us, and concernment for us, if he shall see it fit to bring us into a state of suffering.

But if we live in open contempt and violation of God's laws, if we make no conscience of our ways and actions, we cannot possibly have any well-grounded trust and confidence in God; for he hates all the workers of iniquity, and his providence sets itself against them for evil. Bad men draw many mischiefs and inconveniences upon themselves, as the natural consequences of their actions; but, besides this, the vengeance of God haunts and pursues evil-doers; and his just providence many times involves them in many difficulties and dangers, besides and beyond the natural course of things. "Upon the wicked (says David) he will rain snares:" so that, as ever we expect the comfortable effects of

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the Divine care and providence, we must live in a dutiful obedience to God's holy will and laws.

Bad men may make a profession of the true religion, and may in some sort believe it, though they do not live according to it; and yet, perhaps, for all this, out of a mere generosity and obstinacy of mind, they cannot bear to be threatened and terrified out of the profession of the truth; and will endure a great deal of trouble and inconveniences before they will renounce it, knowing themselves to be so far in the right that they stand for the truth, and hoping, perhaps, thereby to make some amends for their bad practice. But, when all is done, nothing gives a man true courage and resolution like the testimony of our own hearts, concerning our own sincerity, and the conscience of well-doing. And, on the contrary, he that hath not the resolution and patience to mortify his lusts, and to restrain his appetites, and to subdue his irregular passions for the sake of God and religion, will not easily bring himself to submit to great sufferings upon that account. There is considerable difficulty in the practice of religion, and the resolute course of a holy life; but surely it is much easier to live as religion requires we should do, than to lay down our lives for it; and (as I have told you upon another occasion), he that cannot prevail with himself to live like a saint, will much more hardly be persuaded to die a martyr. I proceed to the

Third point, namely, What ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of God, under the notion of a faithful Creator, does afford to us, under all our sufferings, for a good conscience and a good cause. "Let them that suffer according to the will

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of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." And in this I shall be very brief.

And this is a firm ground of comfort and encouragement to us, under all our sufferings for God, to consider him as the Author of our beings, or as it is expressed in the text, as "a faithful Creator;" one that is not fickle and inconstant in his affection and kindness to his creatures, but is true to his own design, and will not abandon and forsake the work of his own hands: so great a benefit as that of our beings, freely conferred upon us, is but an earnest of God's further kindness to us, and future care of us; if, by our ill carriage towards him, we do not render ourselves unworthy and incapable of it; that we are God's creatures, is a demonstration that he hath a kindness for us: if he had not, he would never have made us; as it is excellently said in the Wisdom of Solomon: (chap. xi. 23, 24.) "Thou hast mercy upon all, for thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made; for never wouldst thou have made any thing if thou hadst hated it." And, (ver. 26.) "Thou sparest all, for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of souls."

To whom then may we with so much confidence commit ourselves, as to him who freely gave us our being? From whom may we expect so tender a regard and consideration of our case, and all the circumstances of it, as from this great founder and benefactor? For he that made us knows our frame, and whereof we are made, and how much we are able to bear; he considers our strength, or rather our weakness, and what courage and resolution he hath endued us withal, and what comfort

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and support we stand in need of in the day of tribulation. And as they who make armour are wont to try that which they think to be good and well-tempered with a stronger charge not to break and hurt it, but to prove and praise it, so God exerciseth those whom he hath fitted and tempered for it, with manifold temptations, "that the trial of their faith," as St. Peter expresseth it, (1 Pet. i. 7.) "being much more precious than of gold tried in the fire, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

So that this consideration, that we are God's creatures, does (as I may say) oblige him in faithfulness to his own act, and in consequence of his bringing us into being at first, to be concerned for us afterwards, so as never to abandon us, nor quite to take away his loving-kindness and mercy from us, till we are good for nothing, and do in a manner cease to be what he made us, that is, reasonable creatures. A person or people must have proceeded to the utmost degree of degeneracy, when God will consider them no longer as his creatures, nor shew any pity or favour to them; things must be come to extremity, when God deals thus with us, as he threatened the people of Israel: (Isaiah xxvii. 11.) "When the boughs are withered, they shall be broken off, and set on fire; for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour."

And now I have done with the three points which I proposed to handle from this text; and the discourse which I have made upon them, does all along apply itself, by directing us how we ought to commit ourselves to the providence of God in all

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cases of danger and suffering, especially for the cause of God and his truth; viz. in the faithful discharge of our duty and a good conscience, and by a firm trust and confidence in the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Providence, not doubting but that he who made us, and knows our frame, will have a tender care of us, and "not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able."

And as to our present danger, and that terrible storm which threatens us, let us pray to God, if it be his will, to divert it; but if otherwise he hath determined, to fit and prepare us for it. And let us be fervent and earnest in our prayers to him, not that he is moved by our importunity, but that we may thereby be qualified and made fit to receive the mercy which we beg of him.

And let us take this occasion to do that which we should have done without it, to break off our sins by repentance, and to turn every one of us from the evil of our ways; that hereby we may render God propitious to us, and put ourselves under the more immediate care and protection of his providence; that we may prevent his judgments, and turn away his wrath and displeasure from us, as he did once from a great and sinful city and people, upon their sincere humiliation and repentance, (Jonah iii. 10.) where it is said of the people of Nineveh, that "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not." Above all, let us be sincere in the profession of our religion, and conscientious in the practice of it; nothing will bear us up under great trials and sufferings, like "the testimony of a good conscience, void of offence towards God and towards men."

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I will conclude this whole discourse with those apostolical blessings and prayers: (Col. i. 10, 11.) "That ye may walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness." And, (2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.) "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good work. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Amen.

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SERMON C.

OF THE WORK ASSIGNED TO EVERY MAN, AND THE SEASON FOR DOING IT.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. —JOHN ix. 4.

THESE words our blessed Saviour spake of himself, whilst he was upon earth; in which he tells us, that he was sent by God into the world, and had a certain work and employment appointed him during his abode in it. A great work indeed! to instruct, and reform, and save mankind. A work of great labour and pains, and patience, not to be done in a short time; and yet the time for doing it was not long after he came into the world: it was a good while before he began it; and, after he began it, the time of working was not long before the night came, and put an end to it: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

But this which our Saviour here speaks of himself, and which properly belongs to him, and no other, may yet be accommodated to every man, with some allowance for the difference and disproportion. For though every man be not sent by God into the world after so peculiar a manner, and upon so particular and vast a design; yet upon a general account, every man is sent by God into this world, and hath a work given him to do in it, which he is

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concerned vigorously to mind, and to prosecute with all his might. And though every man be not sent to save the whole world, as the Son of God was, yet every man is sent by God into the world, to work out his own salvation, and to take care of that, in the first place, and then to promote the salvation of others, as much as in him lies. So that every one of us may, in a very good sense, accommodate these words of our Saviour to himself: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

I shall therefore, at this time, take the liberty to handle these words according to this moral accommodation of them, and apply what our Saviour here says of himself, to every man that cometh into the world; and this I shall do, by shewing these three things;

First, That every man hath a work assigned him to do in this world, by him that sent him into it; and may in some sense say, as our blessed Saviour did of himself, "I must work the works of him that sent me."

Secondly, That there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in. "While it is day."

Thirdly, That after this season is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working. "The night cometh, when no man can work."

First, Every man hath a work assigned him to do in this world, by him that sent him into it, and may in some sense say, as our blessed Saviour did of himself, "I must work the works of him that sent me." God, who made man a reasonable creature, and hath endowed him with faculties, whereby he is capable of knowing and serving him, hath ap-

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pointed him a work and service suitable to these faculties; and, having infused an immortal soul into this earthly body, hath certainly designed him for a state beyond this life, in which he shall be for ever happy or miserable, according as he useth and demeans himself in this world.

So that the work which every one of us hath to do in this world, is to prepare and fit ourselves for that eternal duration which remains for us after death. For the life which we live now in this world, is a time of exercise, a short state of probation and trial, in order to a durable and endless state, in which we shall be immutably fixed in another world. This world into which we are now sent for a little while, is, as it were, God's school, in which immortal spirits, clothed with flesh, are trained and bred up for eternity: and therefore the best, the only sure way to be happy for ever, is so to improve the short and uncertain time of this life, that we may approve ourselves to God in this world, and enjoy him in the next: or (as St. Paul expresseth it) that "having our fruit unto holiness, our end may be everlasting life."

And this work consists in these three things:

I. In the care of our own salvation.

II. In doing what we can to promote the salvation of others.

III. And, in order to both these, in the careful improvement and good husbandry of our time.

I. In the care of our own salvation. And this consists in two things:

1. In the worship of Almighty God.

2. In the careful and conscientious practice and obedience of his holy laws.

1. The care of our own salvation consists in the

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pious and devout worship of Almighty God; that we honour him, and pay him that homage and respect, which is due from creatures to him that made them, and is the great Sovereign and Judge of the world; that we have an inward reverence and esteem of him, and that we express this by all solemn external acknowledgments of him; as by praying to him for the supply of our wants; by praising him for all the blessings and benefits which we have received at his hands; and that we set apart constant and solemn times for the performance of these duties; and that, when we are employed in them, we be serious and hearty, and attentive to what we are about, and perform every part of Divine worship with those circumstances of reverence and respect, which may testify our awful sense of the Divine Majesty, and our inward and profound veneration of him, with whom we have to do: and this is that which is directly and properly religion.

2. This care of our own salvation does consist, likewise, in the conscientious and constant obedience and practice of all God's holy laws, in the conformity of our lives and actions to the laws which he hath given us, whether they be natural, or written upon our hearts, or made known to us by the revelation of his word; that we govern our passions by reason, and moderate ourselves in the use of sensual delights, so as not to transgress the rules of temperance and chastity; that we demean ourselves towards others, and converse with them with justice and fidelity, with kindness and charity.

These are the sum of the Divine laws, and the heads of our duty towards ourselves and others; all which are more powerfully enforced upon us by the revelation of the gospel, and the plain promises

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and threatenings of it; the faith of Christ being the most firm and effectual principle both of piety towards God, and of universal obedience to all his particular commands.

And this is the great work which God hath sent us to do in the world. So the wise man sums up our duty: (Eccles. xii. 13.) "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." The fear and reverence of the Divine Majesty is the great foundation and principle of religion; but obedience to God's laws is the life and practice of it. God does not expect that we should spend the greatest part of our time in the immediate acts of religion, and in the solemn duties of his worship and service; but only that we should allot a fitting proportion of our time to these, according to the circumstances of our condition in this world, and the example of holy and good men that are in the like circumstances with ourselves. For such is the goodness of God, that he does not only allow us to provide for the necessaries and conveniences of this life, but hath made it our duty so to do. It is one of the precepts of the gospel, which the apostle chargeth the bishops and teachers of the gospel to inculcate frequently upon Christians, "that they which have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works;" that is, to employ themselves in the works of an honest calling: for necessary uses; that is, for the support of their families, and the relief of those who are in want and necessity. And the apostle lays great weight and stress upon this as a very great duty: (Tit. iii. 8.) "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works.

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These things are good and profitable unto men;" that is, of general benefit and advantage to mankind.

So that no man's calling is a hinderance to religion, but a part of it; and by performing the duties of piety in their proper seasons, and spending the rest of our time in any honest and useful employment, we may make our whole life a perpetual serving of God; we may glorify God in our eating and drinking, and in all other lawful and useful actions of life. In serving the occasions and necessities of life with sobriety and temperance, and in managing our worldly commerce with justice and integrity, we may serve God, and perform considerable duties of religion.

So that provided we do nothing that is sinful, and manage the actions and concernments of this life with a due regard and subserviency to the great interests of eternity, we may do the work of God all the while we are providing for ourselves, and employed in the works of an honest calling: for God, who hath designed this life in order to the other, considers the necessities of our present state, and allows us to make provision for it.

There are some persons, indeed, whose birth and condition sets them above the common employments of life, and the works of an ordinary calling: but these also have a work given them to do: for God hath sent no man into the world to no purpose, and only to take his pastime therein; *neque enim ita generati sumus a natura, ut ad ludum et jocum facti esse videamur; sed ad severitatem potius, et quædam studia graviora atque majora;* "For we are not (says Tully *de offic. lib.* 1.) so framed by nature, as if we were made for sport and jest, but for more

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serious employments, and for greater and weightier business;" and those who are tied to no particular calling, may allow so much larger portions of their time to religion, and the service of God: and God likewise expects from them, that they should be useful to mankind in some higher and nobler way, according to the publicness of their station and influence. Such persons may be serviceable to their country, and the affairs of government, and in the care of public justice, and may employ their time in preparing and rendering themselves more fit for this service. They may find a great deal of work to do in the good government of their families, and in the prudent care and management of their estates, and in reconciling differences among their neighbours, and in considering the necessities of the poor, and providing for their supply.

So that, besides the proper work of religion, and the more immediate service of God, every man in the world, how exempt soever his condition be from the common care and drudgery of human life, may find work enough wherein he may usefully employ all his time, and provide for his own, and for the common benefit of mankind; and God expects it as a duty from such, that every man should employ himself in some work or other, suitable to the station in which God hath placed him in this world.

II. The work which God hath given us to do in the world, consists in doing what we can to further and promote the salvation of others. This chiefly lies upon us, who are the ministers of God, and to whom the word of reconciliation is committed. We are more especially commissioned and appointed for this work, and are ambassadors for Christ, to beseech

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men in his stead to be reconciled to God. We are sent by God in a more peculiar manner, and appointed for this very work, to watch for men's souls, and to be instruments and means of their eternal happiness. And therefore we who are sent by God in a more peculiar manner, and have this work assigned to do in the world, ought to be very vigorous and industrious in it: and this, whether we consider the nature of our employment, or the glorious reward of it.

1. If we consider the nature of our employment, both in respect of the honour and the happiness of it. It is the most honourable work that mortal man can be employed in; it is the same in kind, and in the main end and design of it, with that of the blessed angels; for we also are "ministering spirits, sent forth" by God to minister for the good of those "who shall be heirs of salvation." We are the messengers and ambassadors of God to men, sent to treat with them about the terms of their peace and reconciliation with God, to offer salvation to them, and to direct them to the best ways and means of procuring it. Nay, we have the honour to be employed in the very same work that the Son of God was, when he was upon the earth, "to seek and to save them that are lost;" and "to call sinners to repentance;" and to carry on that work, whereof he himself laid the foundation, when he was in the world. And what greater honour can be put upon the sons of men, than to help forward that glorious design and undertaking of the Son of God for the salvation of mankind?

And it is an employment no less happy than honourable; it is not to drudge about the mean and low concernments of this life, a perpetual toil and

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care about "what we shall eat and drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed," which is the business of a worldly employment; but it is a direct and immediate "seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," and a continual endeavour to promote these. It does not consist in the labour of our body, and in bodily toil; but in the delightful exercise of our minds, about the best and noblest objects, God, and heaven, and eternity; in an earnest and faithful endeavour, by all wise ways and means, to gain souls to God, and to turn sinners from the errors of their ways, and to prevent their eternal ruin and destruction; and, next to the procuring of our own happiness, to be instrumental to the happiness of others, which is certainly the most pleasant and noble work that we can possibly be employed in; especially if we consider that, by the very nature of our employment we do at the same time, and by the very same means, carry on both these designs, of the salvation of ourselves and others. So St. Paul tells Timothy, when he exhorts him, upon this very consideration, to give himself wholly to this blessed work; because, says he, "in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." (1 Tim. iv. 16.) And when two of the greatest and best designs in the world, our own happiness in the salvation of others, do so happily meet in one, and are jointly carried on by the same labour: this ought to be a great spur and incitement to us, to be vigorous and unwearied, and "abundant in the work of the Lord;" and a mighty encouragement to us "to preach the word, to be instant in season, and out of season," and "to be examples to others, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity;" as St. Paul

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chargeth Timothy in the most solemn and awful manner, "before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom." (1 Tim. iv. 12. and 2 Tim. iv. 1.). And then,

2. If we consider the glorious reward of this work; if we be faithful and industrious in it, it will advance us to a higher degree of glory and happiness in the other world. "They that be wise (says the prophet, Dan. xii. 3.) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." They that are industrious in this work, as they are worthy of double honour in this world, so they shall shine with a double glory and lustre in the other.

But though this work of promoting the salvation of others be chiefly incumbent upon those whose office it is to attend upon this very thing, yet we are all of us concerned in it; according to the advantages and opportunities we have for it. Every man is concerned to help forward the salvation of his brother, and not to let him perish, if he can help it; and it is in every man's power to contribute something to this blessed work of saving others, by seasonable counsel and advice, by kind and gentle reproof, but especially by a holy and exemplary conversation, by a shining virtue, which hath a silent power of persuasion, and I know not what secret charm and attraction to draw and allure others to the imitation of it.

III. And in order to both these, the saving of ourselves and others, this work which God hath given us to do in the world, consists in the careful use and good husbandry of our time; for without

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this, neither the one nor the other can be promoted and carried on to any purpose. Time is the season and opportunity of carrying on of any work, and for that reason is one of the most valuable things; and yet nothing is more wastefully spent, and more prodigally squandered away by a great part of mankind than this, which, next to our immortal souls, is of all other things most precious; because, upon the right use or abuse of our time, our eternal happiness or misery does depend. Men have generally some guard upon themselves, as to their money and estates, and will not with eyes open suffer others to rob and deprive them of it: but we will let any body almost rob us of our time; and are contented to expose this precious treasure to every body's rapines and extortion, and can quietly look on, whilst men thrust in their hands, and take it out by whole handfuls, as if it were of no greater value than silver was in Solomon's days, no more than "the stones in the street." And yet when it is gone, all the silver and gold in the world cannot purchase and fetch back the least moment of it, when perhaps we would give all the world for a very small part of that time, which we parted with upon such cheap and easy terms.

Good God! what a stupid and senseless prodigality is this! do we consider what we do, when we give away such large portions of our time to our ease and pleasure, to diversion and idleness, to trifling and unprofitable conversation, to the making and receiving of impertinent visits, and the usual and almost inseparable attendants thereof, spiteful observations upon them that are present, and slandering and backbiting those that are absent, (for the great design of most people in visits, is not to better

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one another, but to spy and make faults, and not to mend them; to get time off their hands, to shew their fine clothes, and to recommend themselves to the mutual contempt of one another, by a plentiful impertinence;) when we part with it by wholesale in sleep and dressings, and can spend whole mornings between the comb and the glass, and the afternoon at plays, and whole nights in gaming, or in riot, and lewdness, and intemperance; in all which, people commonly waste their money and their time together!

Nay, how do even the best of us misplace this precious treasure; and though we do not employ it to wicked purposes, and in works of iniquity, yet we do not apply it to the best and noblest use—to the glory of God, and the good and salvation of men; by thus laying out this treasure, we might "lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven," and help others on in the way thither.

Thus our blessed Saviour employed his precious time, in "going about doing good," in all kinds and upon all occasions, healing the bodies and enlightening the minds, and saving the souls of men: this was his business, and this was his delight; it was his "meat and drink," and his very life, he spent himself in it, and sacrificed his ease, and his safety, and his life, to these great ends for which he came into the world: he considered the goodness and the greatness of his work, and the little time he had to do it in, which made him incessantly industrious in it, and to run the race which was set before him with great speed, and to "work while it is day," because he knew the night would come "when no man can work." And this brings me to the

Second thing I observed from the text; namely,

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that there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in; "while it is day—I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day." And this day comprehends all the opportunities of our life, which will be soon over, and therefore had need to be well spent. A great part of our life is past before the season of working begins: it is a great while before the use of our reason begins, and we come to have our senses exercised to discern between good and evil; before our understandings are ripe for the serious consideration of God and religion, and for the due care of our souls, and for the eternal concernment of another world; so that this first part of our life is in a great measure useless and unprofitable to us, in regard to our great design. For infancy and childhood are but the dawnings of this day, and no fit time to work in; and youth, which is as the morning of this day, though it is the flower of our time, and the most proper season of all other for the remembrance of God and the impressions of religion; yet it is usually possessed by vanity and vice; the common custom and practice of the world, hath devoted this best part of our age to the worst employments, to the service of sin and of our lusts. How very few are there that lay hold of this opportunity, and employ it to the best purposes? And yet the following course of our lives doth in a great measure depend upon it; for most persons do continue and hold on in the way in which they set out at first, whether it be good or bad. And those who neglect to improve this first opportunity of their lives, do seldom recover themselves afterwards. God's grace may seize upon men in any part of their lives; but, according to the most ordinary methods of it, the foundations and principles of

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religion and virtue are most commonly laid in a pious and virtuous education. This is the great opportunity of our lives, which settleth and fixeth most men, either in a good or bad course; and the fortune of their whole lives does usually follow it, and depend upon it.

It is true, indeed, our day continues many times a great while longer, and we are to work while it continues; and it is never too late to begin to do well, and to enter upon a good course; but there is no such proper and advantageous season for the beginning of this work, as in our youth and tender years. "This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation." God's grace is then most forward and ready to assist us; and we are then least of all indisposed for the receiving of the impressions of it; and the impressions of it do then go deepest into our minds, and are most lasting and durable. But if we neglect this opportunity, we provoke God, by degrees, to withdraw his grace, and to take away his Holy Spirit from us, and by degrees we settle in vicious habits, and are every day more and more hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. It is never too late to work while the day lasts; but the sooner we begin this work, and set about it in good earnest, the easier we shall find it; if we defer it late, every step will be up the hill, and against the grain.

Thirdly, After this season is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working; when this day is once at an end, then cometh the night "when no man can work." The night is a time unfit for work, when we can hardly do any thing, if we had never so great mind to it; and there is such a night coming upon every one of us, and woe be to

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us if we have our work to do when the night overtakes us.

There is usually an evening before this night, when it will be very difficult for us, and next to impossible, to do this work; and this is the time of sickness and old age, in which men are commonly unfit for any work, but most of all, that which requires the whole force and vigour of our minds, the business of religion. If we attempt this work then, we shall go very heartlessly about it, and do it very imperfectly, and be forced to slubber it over, and to huddle it up in great haste and confusion, and so as we can hardly hope that God will accept it. For how unfit are men to do any thing, when they are full of the sense of their own infirmities, and life itself is become so great a burden to them, that they are hardly able to stand under it! How incapable shall we then be of doing the greatest and most momentous work of our lives, when our faculties are almost quite spent and worn out, and all the powers of life are decayed in us; when our understandings are dark and dull, our memories frail and treacherous, and our hearts hard and "deceitful above all things!" When sickness and old age overtake us, we shall then find to our sorrow, that "sufficient for that day is the evil thereof;" we shall have need then of nothing else to do, but to bear our infirmities with patience and decency; and it is well if we can rally together, of the broken forces of our reason, so much as may be a sufficient guard to us against peevishness and discontent; we had need then have nothing else to do, but to be old and weak, to be sick and die.

Besides, how can we expect that God should accept of any work that we do at such a time?

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With what face can we put off God with the dregs of our life? or how can we hope that he will be pleased with the service of those years, which we ourselves "take no pleasure in? if we offer the lame in sacrifice, is it not evil? and if we offer the blind, is it not evil? offer it now to thy governor, and see if he will be pleased with thee."

And sickness is commonly as bad a time as old age, and usually encumbered with greater difficulties, and clogged with more indispositions. If a violent distemper seize upon us, it many times takes away the use of our reason, and deprives us of all opportunity of consideration; it makes us both insensible of the danger of our condition, and incapable of using the means to avoid it. And if we have neglected religion before, and have put off the great work of our life to the end of it, our opportunity is irrecoverably lost; for there is nothing to be done in religion when our reason is once departed from us; the night is then come indeed, and darkness hath overtaken us; and though we be still alive, yet are we as unfit for any work, as if we were naturally dead.

And this is no such rare and extraordinary case; for it happens to many; and every man that wilfully defers the work of religion and repentance to a dying hour, hath reason to fear that he shall be thus surprised in his sin and security, and by the just judgment of God deprived of all the opportunity of life and salvation, while he is yet in the land of the living.

But if God be more merciful unto us, and visit us with such a sickness as leaves us the use of our understandings, yet all that we do in religion, at such a time, proceeds from so violent a cause, from the

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present terror of death, and the dreadful apprehension of that eternal misery which is just ready to swallow us up, that it is one of the hardest things in the world, not only for others, but even for ourselves, to know whether our resolutions, and this sudden and hasty fit of repentance, be sincere or not: for it is natural, and almost unavoidable, for a man to repent, and be sorry for what he hath done, when he is going to execution; but the great question is, what this man would do if his life were spared? whether his repentance would hold good, and he would become a new man, and change his former course of life, or relapse into it again? And it is by no means certain that he would not be as bad as he was before: because we see many, who, when they lie upon a sick bed, give all imaginable testimony of a deep sorrow, and a hearty repentance for their sins, who yet, upon their recovery, return to their former sins with a greater appetite, and make themselves ten times more the children of wrath than they were before. So that all the work that we can do at such a time ought not to be much reckoned upon, and can give us little or no comfort; because it is so infinitely uncertain whether it be real and sincere, and whether the effect of so violent a cause would last and continue if the cause were removed. Therefore we should "work while it is day;" for whatever we do in this evening of our lives, will be done with great difficulty, and with very doubtful success.

But, besides this evening, there is a night coming, "when no man can work:" death will seize upon us, and then our state will be irrecoverably concluded: after that it will be impossible for us to do any thing towards our own salvation, or to have any

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thing done for us by others; the prayers of the living will not avail the dead; "as the tree falls, so it lies; there is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor device in the grave" whither we are going; therefore, according to the counsel of the wise man, "what our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might."

This counsel concerns all ages and persons. I will apply it to the young, in the words of the wise preacher: (Eccles. xii. 1.) "Remember, now, thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." To them who are in the vigour of their age, in the words of the prophet, (Isa. lv. 6.) "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." And, to them that are old, in the words of another prophet, (Jer. xiii. 16.) "Give glory to the Lord your God, before he causeth darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness." And let us, every one of us, of what age or condition soever, apply it to ourselves, in the words of our blessed Saviour here in the text: "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

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SERMON CI.

OF THE GREAT DUTIES OF NATURAL RELIGION, WITH THE WAYS AND MEANS OF KNOWING THEM.

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—MICAH vi. 6, 7, 8.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the prophet tells the people of Israel, that the Lord had a controversy with them; and, that he might direct them how to take up this quarrel, he brings in one making this inquiry in the name of the people: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" That is, by what kind of worship or devotion may I address myself to him in the most acceptable manner? by what means may I hope to appease his displeasure? To satisfy this inquiry, he first instanceth in the chief kinds of sacrifices and expiations that were in use among the Jews and heathens: "Shall I come before him with burnt-

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offerings?" the constant sacrifice that was offered to God by way of acknowledgment of his dominion over the creatures; "with calves of a year old?" which was the sin-offering which the high-priest offered for himself. Or, will he rather accept of those great and costly sacrifices which were offered upon solemn and public occasions, such as that was which Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple? "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" Or, if none of these will do, shall I try to atone him, after the manner of the heathen, by the dearest thing in the world, the first-born of my children? "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" If God was to be appeased at all, surely, they thought, it must be by some of these ways; for, beyond these, they could imagine nothing of greater value and efficacy.

But the prophet tells them, that they were quite out of the way in thinking to pacify God upon these terms? that there are other things which are much better and more pleasing to him than any of these sacrifices. For some of them were expressly forbidden by God, as "the offering up of our children;" and, for the rest, they were not good in themselves, but merely by virtue of their institution, and because they were commanded. But the things which he would recommend to them are such as are good in their own nature, and required of us by God upon that account. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

So that in these words you have,

First, An inquiry which is the best way to ap-

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pease God when he is offended? "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?"

Secondly, The way that men are apt to take in this case; and that is, by some external piece of religion and devotion; such as were sacrifices both among Jews and heathens. "Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings," &c. By which question the prophet intimates, that men are very apt to pitch upon this course.

Thirdly, The course which God himself directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee," &c.

The first being a mere question, there needs no more to be said of it; only, that it is a question of great importance: what is the most effectual way to appease God when we have offended him? For who can bear his indignation; and who can stand before him when once he is angry? Let us consider, then, in the

Second place, The way that men are apt to take to pacify God; and that is, by some external piece of religion and devotion; such as were sacrifices among the Jews and heathens. "Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings?" This is the way which men are most apt to choose. The Jews, you see, pitched upon the external parts of their religion; those which were most pompous and solemn; the richest and most costly sacrifices; so they might but keep their sins they were well enough content to offer up any thing else to God; they thought nothing too good for him, provided he would not oblige them to become better.

And thus it is among ourselves, when we appre-

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hend God is displeased with us, and his judgments are abroad in the earth, we are content to do any thing but to learn righteousness; we are willing to submit to any kind of external devotion and humiliation, to fast and pray, to afflict ourselves and to cry mightily unto God; things some of them good in themselves, but the least part of that which God requires of us.

And as for the church of Rome, in case of public judgments and calamities, they are the most inquisitive and (as they pretend) the most skilful people in the world to pacify God; and they have a thousand solemn devices to this purpose. I do not wrong them by representing them inquiring after this manner: "Shall I go before a crucifix, and bow myself to it, as to the high God? And because the Lord is a great King, and it is, perhaps, too much boldness and arrogancy to make immediate addresses always to him; to which of the saints or angels shall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of paternosters, or with ten thousands of Ave-Marias? Shall the host travel in procession, or myself undertake a tedious pilgrimage? Or shall I list myself a soldier for the holy war, or for the extirpation of heretics? Shall I give half my estate to a convent for my transgression, or chastise and punish my body for the sin of my soul?" Thus men deceive themselves, and will submit to all the extravagant severities that the petulancy and folly of men can devise and impose upon them. And, indeed, it is not to be imagined, when men are once under the power of superstition, how ridiculous they may be; and yet think themselves religious! how prodigiously they may play the fool, and yet believe they

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please God; what cruel and barbarous things they may do to themselves and others, and yet be verily persuaded they do God good service.

And what is the mystery of all this, but that men are loath to do that, without which nothing else that we do is acceptable to God? They hate to be reformed; and for this reason they will be content to do any thing rather than be put to the trouble of mending themselves: every thing is easy in comparison of this task, and God may have any terms of them, so he will let them be quiet in their sins, and excuse them from the real virtues of a good life. And this brings me to the

Third thing which I principally intended to speak to: The course which God himself directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" In the handling of which I shall

First, Consider those several duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us.

Secondly, By what ways and means God hath discovered these duties to us, and the goodness of them: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good," &c.

I. We will briefly consider the several duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

It was usual among the Jews to reduce all the duties of religion to these three heads: justice,

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mercy, and piety; under the first two, comprehending the duties which we owe to one another; and, under the third, the duties which we owe to God.

1. Justice. And I was going to tell you what it is, but I considered that every man knows it as well as any definition can explain it to him. I shall only put you in mind of some of the principal instances of it, and the several virtues comprehended under it. And,

First, Justice is concerned in the making of laws, that they be such as are equal and reasonable, useful and beneficial, for the honour of God and religion, and for the public good of human society; this is a great trust, in the discharge of which, if men be biassed by favour or interest, and drawn aside from the consideration and regard of the public good, it is a far greater crime, and of worse consequence, than any private act of injustice between man and man.

And, then, justice is also concerned in the due execution of laws; which are the guard of private property, the security of public peace and of religion and good manners. And,

Lastly, In the observance of laws and obedience to them; which is a debt that every man owes to human society.

But more especially, justice is concerned in the observance of those laws, whether of God or man, which respect the rights of men, and their mutual commerce and intercourse with one another. That we use honesty and integrity in all our dealings, in opposition to fraud and deceit; truth and fidelity, in opposition to falsehood and breach of trust; equity and good conscience, in opposition to all kind of oppression and exaction. These are the

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principal branches and instances of this great and comprehensive duty of justice; the violation whereof is so much the greater sin, because this virtue is the firmest bond of human society, upon the observation whereof the peace and happiness of mankind does so much depend.

2. Mercy, which does not only signify the inward affection of pity and compassion towards those that are in misery and necessity, but the effects of it, in the actual relief of those whose condition calls for our charitable help and assistance; by feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, and vindicating the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted, and ministering ease and relief to them if it be in our power. And this is a very lovely virtue, and argues more goodness in men than mere justice doth. For justice is a strict debt; but mercy is favour and kindness. And this, perhaps, may be the reason of the different expressions in the text, that when God barely commands us to do justly, he requires we should love mercy; that is, take a particular pleasure and delight in the exercise of this virtue, which is so proper and agreeable to mankind, that we commonly call it humanity; giving it its name from our very nature. In short, it is so excellent a virtue that I should be very sorry that any religion should be able to pretend to the practice of it more than our own.

3. Piety; "To walk humbly with thy God." "To walk humbly in the fear of the Lord;" so the Chaldee paraphrase renders these words. And this phrase may comprehend all those acts of religion which refer immediately to God; a firm belief of his being and perfections; an awful sense of him as the dread Sovereign and righteous Judge of the world;

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a due regard to his service, and a reverent behaviour of ourselves towards him in all acts of worship and religion, in opposition to atheism and a profane neglect and contempt of God and religion; a new and monstrous kind of impiety! which of late years hath broke in upon us, and got head among us, not only contrary to the example of former ages, but in despite of the very genius and temper of the nation, which is naturally devout and zealous in religion.

Or else this phrase of "walking humbly with God," may refer more particularly to the posture and condition of the people of Israel at that time, who were fallen under the heavy displeasure of God for their sins. And then the duty required is, that being sensible how highly God hath been offended by us, by the general corruption and viciousness of the age, which, like a leprosy, hath spread itself almost over the whole body of the nation, and by that open lewdness and those insolent impieties which are daily committed amongst us; I say, that, being deeply sensible of this, we do, with all humility, acknowledge our sins to God, and repent of them, and implore his mercy and forgiveness, and resolve by his grace to turn every one from the evil of our ways, and from the wickedness that is in our hands; which God grant we may every one do this day * according to the pious design and intention of it. And, if we be sincere in this resolution, "who can tell but God will turn and repent, and turn away his anger from us, that we perish not." Nay, we have great reason to believe, that he will be pacified towards us. So he hath declared: (Isa. i. 16.) "Wash ye, make you clean, put away,

* This Sermon was preached upon occasion of a public fast.

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the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow: come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." But if we continue unreformed, God will say to us, as he does there to the people of Israel, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? your calling of assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting; and when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; when ye make many prayers, I will not hear." To which, let me add that excellent saying of the son of Sirach to this purpose: (Ecclus. xxxiv. 25, 26.) "He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? So is it with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things. Who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?"

II. Let us consider by what ways and means God hath made known these duties to us, and the goodness and the obligation of them. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee?" I shall mention five ways whereby God hath discovered this to us.

1. By a kind of natural instinct.
2. By natural reason.
3. By the general vote and consent of mankind.
4. By external revelation.
5. By the inward dictates and motions of God's Spirit upon the minds of men.

First, By a kind of natural instinct, by which I

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mean a secret impression upon the minds of men, whereby they are naturally carried to approve some things as good and fit, and to dislike other things, as having a native evil and deformity in them. And this I call a natural instinct, because it does not seem to proceed so much from the exercise of our reason, as from a natural propension and inclination, like those instincts which are in brute creatures of natural affection and care toward their young ones. And that these inclinations are precedent to all reason and discourse about them, evidently appears by this, that they do put forth themselves every whit as vigorously in young persons as in those of riper reason; in the rude and ignorant sort of people, as in those who are more polished and refined. For we see plainly that the young and ignorant have as strong impressions of piety and devotion, as true a sense of gratitude and justice and pity, as the wiser and more knowing part of mankind. A plain indication that the reason of mankind is prevented by a kind of natural instinct and anticipation concerning the good or evil, the comeliness or deformity of these things. And though this do not equally extend to all the instances of our duty, yet as to the great lines and essential parts of it, mankind hardly need to consult any other oracle than the mere propensions and inclinations of their nature: as, whether we ought to reverence the Divine nature, to be grateful to those who have conferred benefits upon us, to speak the truth, to be faithful to our promise, to restore that which is committed to us in trust, to pity and relieve those that are in misery, and in all things to do to others as we would have them do to us. And this will further appear, if we consider these two things:

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1. That men are naturally innocent or guilty to themselves, according to what they do in these things. So the apostle tells us: (Rom. ii. 14, 15.) "When the gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, and do shew the effect of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts, by turns, (that is, according as they do well or ill) accusing or excusing them." There is a secret comfort in innocence, and a strange pleasure and satisfaction in being acquitted by our own minds for what we do. But, on the contrary, when we contradict these natural dictates, what uneasiness do we find in our own breasts? Nay, even before the fact is committed, our conscience is strangely disquieted at the thoughts of it. When a man does but design to do a bad thing, he is as guilty to himself as if he had committed it. Of this we have a considerable instance, in the first violence that was offered to nature: (Gen. iv. 6.) "The Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?" The very thought of that wickedness which he did but then design, did disorder his mind, and make a change in his very countenance. Guilt is the natural concomitant of heinous crimes; which so soon as ever a man commits, his spirit receives a secret wound, which causeth a great deal of smart and anguish. For guilt is restless, and puts the mind of man into an unnatural working and fermentation, never to be settled again but by repentance. "The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest;" which plainly shews that the mind of man hath a kind of natural sense of good and evil; because, whenever

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we offend against nature, our consciences are touched to the quick, and we receive a sting into our soul, which shoots and pains us, whenever we reflect upon what we have done. I appeal to that witness, which every man carries in his breast, whether this be not true.

2. Men are naturally full of hopes and fears, according as they follow or go against these natural dictates. A good conscience is apt to fill men with confidence and good hopes. It does not only give ease, but security to the mind of man, against the dread of invisible powers, and the fearful apprehensions of a future judgment. Whereas guilt fills men with dismal apprehensions of danger, and continual misgivings concerning their own safety. Thus it was with Cain, after he had slain his brother: "It shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me." Nay, when a man hath done a secret fault, which none can accuse him of, yet then is he haunted with the terrors of his own mind, and cannot be secure in his own apprehensions: which plainly shews, that men are conscious to themselves, when they do well, and when they do amiss; and that the same natural instinct which prompts men to their duty, fills them with good hopes when they have done it, and with secret fears and apprehensions of danger when they have done contrary to it.

Secondly, God shews man what is good, by natural reason; and that two ways: by the convenience of things to our nature; and by their tendency to our happiness and interest.

First, Reason shews us the convenience of things to our nature; and whatever is agreeable to the primitive design and intention of nature, that we call

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good; whatever is contrary thereto, we call evil. For example, to honour and love God. It is natural to honour great power and perfection, and to love goodness wherever it is. So, likewise, gratitude is natural, to acknowledge benefits received, and to be ready to requite them; and the contrary is monstrous, and universally abhorred; and there is no greater sign that any thing is contrary to nature, than if it be detested by the whole kind. It is agreeable also to nature to be just, and to do to others as we would have them to do to us; for this is to make our own natural inclinations and desires the rule of our dealing with others, and to be merciful; for no man that hath not divested himself of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling a pain in himself.

Secondly, Reason shews us the tendency of these things to our happiness and interest. And, indeed, the notion of good and evil does commonly refer to the consequences of things; and we call that good, which will bring some benefit and advantage to us, and that evil which is likely to produce some mischief and inconvenience; and by this rule reason discovers to us that these duties are good.

To begin with piety towards God. Nothing can more evidently tend to our interest, than to make him our friend, upon whose favour our happiness depends. So likewise for gratitude: it is a virtue, to which, if nature did not prompt us, our interest would direct us; for every man is ready to place benefits there where he may hope for a thankful return. Temperance does apparently conduce to our health, which, next to a good conscience, is the most pleasant and valuable thing in the world; whereas the intemperate man is an open enemy to

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himself, and continually making assaults upon his own life. Mercy and pity are not more welcome to others, than they are delightful and beneficial to ourselves; for we do not only gratify our own nature and bowels, by relieving those who are in misery, but we provoke mankind by our example to the like tenderness, and do prudently bespeak the commiseration of others towards us, when it shall be our turn to stand in need of it. And, if we be wise enough, our reason will likewise direct us to be just, as the surest art of thriving in this world; it gives a man a reputation, which is a powerful advantage in all the affairs of this world; it is the shortest and easiest way of dispatching business, the plainest, and least entangled; and though it be not so sudden a way of growing rich, as fraud and oppression, yet it is much surer and more lasting, and not liable to those terrible back-blows and after-reckonings, to which estates got by injustice are.

And natural reason does not only shew us that these things are good, but that the Lord requires them of us; that is, that they have the force and obligation of laws: for there needs nothing more to make any thing a law, than a sufficient declaration that it is the will of God; and this God hath sufficiently signified to mankind by the very frame of our natures, and of those principles and faculties which he hath endued us withal; so that, whenever we act contrary to these, we plainly disobey the will of him that made us, and violate those laws which he hath enacted in our natures, and written upon our hearts.

And this is all the law that the greatest part of mankind were under, before the revelation of the

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gospel. From Adam to Moses, the world was almost solely governed by the natural law; which seems to be the meaning of that hard text, (Rom. v. 13.) "For until the law sin was in the world;" that is, before the law of Moses was given, men were capable of offending against some other law, for otherwise sin could not have been imputed to them; for "sin is not imputed where there is no law." And then it follows: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression;" that is, during that space from Adam to Moses, men sinned against the natural law, and were liable to death upon that account, though they had not offended against an express revelation from God, as Adam had done; for that the apostle seems to mean, by sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression.

Thirdly, God hath shewn us what is good by the general vote and consent of mankind. Not that all mankind do agree concerning virtue and vice; but that as to the greater duties of piety, justice, mercy, and the like, the exceptions are but few in comparison, and not enough to infringe a general consent. And of this I shall offer to you this threefold evidence.

1. That these virtues are generally praised and held in esteem by mankind, and the contrary vices generally reproved and evil spoken of. Now to praise any thing, is to give testimony to the goodness of it; and to censure any thing, is to declare that we believe it to be evil. And if we consult the history of all ages, we shall find, that the things which are generally praised in the lives of men, and recommended to the imitation of posterity, are piety

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and devotion, gratitude and justice, humanity and charity; and that the contrary to these are marked with ignominy and reproach: the former are commended even in enemies, and the latter are branded even by those who had a kindness for the persons that were guilty of them. So constant hath mankind always been in the commendation of virtue, and in the censure of vice. Nay, we find not only those who are virtuous themselves giving their testimony and applause to virtue, but even those who are vicious; not out of love to goodness, but from the conviction of their own minds, and from a secret reverence they bear to the common consent and opinion of mankind. And this is a great testimony, because it is the testimony of an enemy extorted by the mere light and force of truth.

And, on the contrary, nothing is more ordinary than for vice to reprove sin, and to hear men condemn the like, or the same things in others, which they allow in themselves. And this is a clear evidence, that vice is generally condemned by mankind, that many men condemn it in themselves; and those who are so kind as to spare themselves, are very quick-sighted to spy a fault in any body else, and will censure a bad action done by another with as much freedom and impartiality as the most virtuous man in the world.

As to this consent of mankind about virtue and vice, the Scripture frequently appeals. As when it commands us "to provide things honest in the sight of all men; and by well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;" intimating, that there are some things so confessedly good, and owned to be such by so general a vote of mankind, that the worst of men have not the face to open their mouths

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against them. And it is made the character of a virtuous action, if it be lovely and commendable, and "of good report: (Phil. iv. 8.) Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise," make account of these things; intimating to us, that mankind do generally concur in the praise and commendation of what is virtuous.

2. Men do generally glory and stand upon their innocency, when they do virtuously; but are ashamed, and out of countenance, when they do the contrary. Now glory and shame are nothing else but an appeal to the judgment of others, concerning the good or evil of our actions. There are, indeed, some such monsters as are impudent in their impieties, but these are but few in comparison. Generally mankind is modest; the greatest part of those who do evil are apt to blush at their own faults, and to confess them in their countenance, which is an acknowledgment that they are not only guilty to themselves that they have done amiss, but that they are apprehensive that others think so. For guilt is a passion respecting ourselves, but shame regards others. Now it is a sign of shame, that men love to conceal their faults from others, and commit them secretly, in the dark, and without witnesses, and are afraid even of a child or a fool: or, if they be discovered in them, they are solicitous to excuse and extenuate them, and ready to lay the fault upon any body else, or to transfer their guilt, or as much of it as they can, upon others. All which are certain tokens that men are not only naturally guilty to themselves, when they commit a fault, but that they are sensible also what opinions others have of these things.

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And, on the contrary, men are apt to stand upon their justification, and to glory when they have done well. The conscience of a man's own virtue and integrity lifts up his head, and gives him confidence before others, because he is satisfied they have a good opinion of his actions. What a good face does a man naturally set upon a good deed! And how does he sneak when he hath done wickedly, being sensible that he is condemned by others, as well as by himself! No man is afraid of being upbraided for having dealt honestly or kindly with others, nor does account it any calumny or reproach to have it reported of him that he is a sober and chaste man. No man blusheth when he meets a man with whom he hath kept his word and discharged his trust: but every man is apt to do so, when he meets one with whom he has dealt dishonestly, or who knows some notorious crime by him.

3. Vice is generally forbidden and punished by human laws; but against the contrary virtues there never was any law. Some vices are so manifestly evil in themselves, or so mischievous to human society, that the laws of most nations have taken care to discountenance them by severe penalties. Scarce any nation was ever so barbarous as not to maintain and vindicate the honour of their gods and religion by public laws. Murder and adultery, rebellion and sedition, perjury and breach of trust, fraud and oppression, are vices severely prohibited by the laws of most nations: a clear indication what opinion the generality of mankind, and the wisdom of nations, have always had of these things.

But now against the contrary virtues there never was any law. No man was ever impeached for living "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this pre-

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sent world:" a plain acknowledgment, that mankind always thought them good, and never were sensible of the inconvenience of them; for had they been so, they would have provided against them by laws. This St. Paul takes notice of as a great commendation of the Christian virtues: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, kindness, fidelity, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law:" the greatest evidence that could be given that these things are unquestionably good in the esteem of mankind—"against such there is no law." As if he had said, turn over the law of Moses, search those of Athens, and Sparta, and the twelve tables of the Romans, and those innumerable laws that have been added since, and you shall not, in any of them, find any of those virtues that I have mentioned condemned and forbidden: a clear evidence that mankind never took any exception against them, but are generally agreed about the goodness of them.

Fourthly, God hath shewn us what is good by external revelation. In former ages of the world, God revealed his will to particular persons in an extraordinary manner, and more especially to the nation of the Jews; the rest of the world being, in a great measure, left to the conduct of natural light. But, in these latter ages, he hath made public revelation of his will by his Son: and this, as to the matter of our duty, is the same in substance with the law of nature; for our Saviour comprehends all under these two general heads—the love of God and of our neighbour. The apostle reduceth all to three; sobriety, justice, and piety: "The grace of God, that brings salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and

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worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." So that, if we believe the apostle, the gospel teacheth us the very same things which nature dictated to men before; only it hath made a more perfect discovery of them. So that, whatever was doubtful and obscure before is now certain and plain; the duties are still the same, only it offers us more powerful arguments, and a greater assistance to the performance of those duties; so that we may now much better say, than the prophet could in his days, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what it is that the Lord requires of thee."

Fifthly and lastly, God shews us what is good by the motions of his Spirit upon the minds of men. This the Scripture assures us of, and good men have experience more especially of it; though it be hard to give an account of it, and to say what motions are from the Spirit of God, and what from our own minds; for "as the wind blows where it listeth, and we hear the sound of it, but know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes;" so are the operations of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men secret and imperceptible.

And thus I have done with the three things I propounded to speak to. All that now remains is to make some inferences from what hath been said, by way of application.

First, Seeing God hath so abundantly provided that we should know our duty, we are altogether inexcusable if we do not do it. Because "he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of thee;" therefore, "thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art," who livest in a contradiction to this light. God hath acquainted

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us with our duty by such ways as may most effectually both direct and engage us to the practice of it; we are prompted to it by a kind of natural instinct, and strong impressions upon our minds of the difference of good and evil; we are led to the knowledge, and urged to the practice of it, by our nature, and by our reason, and by our interest, and by that which is commonly very prevalent among men, the general voice and consent of mankind; and by the most powerful and governing passions in human nature, by hope, and by fear, and by shame; by the prospect of advantage, by the apprehension of danger, and by the sense of honour; and, to take away all possible excuse of ignorance from us, by an express revelation from God, the clearest and most perfect that ever was made to the world. So that, whenever we do contrary to our duty, in any of these great instances, we offend against all these, and do, in the highest degree, fall under the heavy sentence of our Saviour: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light."

Secondly, You see hence what are the great duties of religion, which God mainly requires of us, and how reasonable they are; piety towards God, and justice and charity towards men; the knowledge whereof is planted in our nature, and grows up with our reason. And these are things which are unquestionably good, and against which we can have no exception; things that were never reproved nor found fault with by mankind, neither our nature nor our reason riseth up against them, or dictates any thing to the contrary. We have all the obligation, and we have all the encouragement to them, and are secure on all hands in the practice

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of them. In the doing of these things, there is no danger to us from the laws of men, no fear of displeasure from God, no offence or sting from our own minds.

And these things, which are so agreeable to our nature, and our reason, and our interest, are the great things which our religion requires of us, more valuable in themselves, and more acceptable to God than "whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices," more than "thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil;" more than if we offered to him "all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." We are not to neglect any institution of God; but, above all, we are to secure the observance of those great duties to which we are directed by our very nature, and tied by the surest and most sacred of all other laws, those which God hath riveted in our souls, and written upon our hearts: and that mankind might have no pretence left to excuse them from these, the Christian religion hath set us free from those many positive and outward observances, that the Jewish religion was encumbered withal; that we might be wholly intent upon these great duties, and mind nothing in comparison of the real and substantial virtues of a good life.

Thirdly, You see, in the last place, what is the best way to appease the displeasure of God towards a sinful nation. God seems to have as great a controversy with us, as he had with the people of Israel, and his wrath is of late years most visibly gone out against us; and proportionably to the full measure of our sins, it hath been poured out upon us in full vials. How have the judgments of God followed us? And how close have they followed one another? What fearful calamities have our eyes seen? enough

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to make the ears of every one that hears them to tingle. What terrible and hazardous wars have we been engaged in? What a raging pestilence did God send among us, that swept away thousands and ten thousands in our streets? What a dreadful and fatal fire, that was not to be checked and resisted in its course, till it had laid in ashes one of the greatest and richest cities in the world? What unseasonable weather have we had of late? as if for the wickedness of men upon the earth, the very ordinances of Heaven were changed, and summer, and winter, seed-time, and harvest, had forgotten their appointed seasons. And, which is more and sadder than all this, what dangerous attempts have been made upon our religion, by the restless adversaries of it?

And now, surely, after all this is come upon us for our sins, it is time for us to look up to him that smites us, and to think of taking up this quarrel. It is time to inquire as they do in the text: "Wherewithal shall we come before the Lord, and bow ourselves before the high God?" And we are apt to take the same course they did, to endeavour to appease God by some external devotion. We have now betaken ourselves to prayer and fasting, and it was very fit, nay necessary we should so do; but let us not think this is all God expects from us. These are but the means to a further end, to oblige us for the future to the practice of a good life. The outward profession of religion is not lost amongst us, there appears still in men a great and commendable zeal for the reformed religion, and there hath been too much occasion for it; but that which God chiefly expects from us, is reformed lives. Piety and virtue are, in a great measure, gone from among us, the manners of men are strangely corrupted, the

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great and weighty things of the law are neglected, justice and mercy, temperance and chastity, truth and fidelity; so that we may take up David's complaint, "Help, Lord! for the righteous man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men."

And till the nation be brought back to a sober sense of religion, from an airy and fantastical piety, to real and unaffected devotion, and from a factious contention about things indifferent, to the serious practice of what is necessary; from our violent heats and animosities, to a more peaceable temper; and by a mutual condescension, on all sides, to a nearer and stronger union among ourselves; till we recover in some measure our ancient virtue and integrity of manners, we have reason to fear that God will still have a controversy with us, notwithstanding all our noise and zeal about religion.

This is the true, this is the only course to appease the indignation of God, and to draw down his favour and blessing upon a poor distracted and gasping nation. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

I have but one word more, and that is, to put you presently upon the practice of one of these duties that I have been persuading you to, and that is, mercy and alms to the poor. If what I have already said have had its effect upon you, I need not use any other arguments; if it have not, I have hardly the heart to use any. I shall only put you in mind again, that God values this above all our external devotion, "he will have mercy rather than sacrifice;" that this is the way to find mercy with God, and to have our prayers speed in heaven; and

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without this, all our fasting and humiliation signifies nothing. And to this purpose I will only read to you those plain and persuasive words of the prophet, which do so fully declare unto us the whole duty of this day, and particularly urge us to this of charity: (Isa. lviii. 5—9.) "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day unto the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward. Then thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am."

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SERMON CII.

INSTITUTED RELIGION NOT INTENDED TO UNDERMINE NATURAL.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.—MATT. ix. 13.

ONE of the most successful attempts that have been made upon religion, by the devil and his instruments, hath been by setting the laws of God at variance with themselves, and by dashing the several parts of religion, and the two tables of the law against one another, to break all in pieces, and, under a pretence of advancing that part of religion which is instituted and revealed, to undermine and destroy that which is natural, and of primary obligation.

To manifest and lay open the mischievous consequences of this design, I shall at this time (by God's assistance) endeavour to make out these two things:

First, That natural religion is the foundation of all instituted and revealed religion.

Secondly, That no revealed or instituted religion was ever designed to take away the obligation of natural duties, but to confirm and establish them.

And to this purpose, I have chosen these words of our Saviour for the foundation of my following discourse: "But go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." The occasion of which words was briefly this: the pharisees found fault with him for keeping company, and eating with publicans and sinners. He owns the

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thing which they objected to him, and endeavours to vindicate himself from any crime or fault in so doing; and that these two ways:

1. By telling them that it was allowed to a physician, and proper for his office and profession, to converse with the sick, in order to their cure and recovery. He may abstain, if he pleaseth, from the conversation of others; but the sick have need of him, and are his proper care, and his business and employment lies among them: "he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance:" they, who were already good, needed not to be called upon to amend and reform their lives; and they that were so conceited of their own righteousness, as the pharisees were, and so confident that they were sound and whole, would not admit of a physician, and thereby rendered themselves incapable of cure; and therefore he did not apply himself to them; but to the publicans and sinners, who were acknowledged, on all hands, both by themselves and others, to be bad men; so that it could not be denied, to be the proper work of a spiritual physician to converse with such persons.

2. By endeavouring to convince them of their ignorance of the true nature of religion, and of the rank and order of the several duties thereby required; "But go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" which saying is quoted by him out of the prophet Hosea, (chap. vi. 6.) "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings;" which text our Saviour cites and applies upon two several occasions; the considering and comparing

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of which will give full light to the true meaning of it.

The first is here in the text, upon occasion of the pharisees finding fault with him, for conversing with publicans and sinners; the other is, (Matt. xii. 7.) where the pharisees blaming the disciples of our Saviour for plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath-day, our Saviour tells them, "If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless;" that is, if they had understood the true nature of religion, and what duties of it are chiefly and in the first place to be regarded, they would not have been so forward to censure this action of his disciples.

So that the plain meaning of this saying is this: that, in comparing the parts of religion and the obligation of duties together, those duties which are of moral and natural obligation are most valued by God, and ought to take place of those which are positive and ritual. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" that is, rather than sacrifice, according to the true meaning of this Hebrew phrase, which is to be understood in a comparative sense, as is evident from the text itself, in Hosea—"I desired mercy, and not sacrifice: and the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings;" if they cannot be observed together, let sacrifice be neglected, and the work of mercy be done.

And the reason of this seems very plain; because shewing mercy, or doing good in any kind, is a prime instance of those moral duties, which do naturally and perpetually oblige; but sacrifice is an instance of positive and ritual observances, and one of the chief of the kind: so that when moral duties and ritual observances come in competition, and do

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clash with one another, the observation of a rite, or positive institution, is to give way to a moral duty; and it is no sin, in that case, to neglect the observation of such a rite, yea, though it were commanded and appointed by God himself. And though this may seem to be a breach of the letter of the law, yet it is according to the true mind and meaning of the law; it being a tacit condition implied in all laws of a ritual and positive nature, provided the observance of them be not to the hinderance and prejudice of any duty, which is of a higher and better nature; in that case, the obligation of it does for that time give way and is suspended.

And this will appear to be the true meaning of this rule, by comparing more particularly the instances to which our Saviour applies it. His disciples passing through the corn on the sabbath-day, and being hungry, plucked the ears and did eat: this our Saviour doth justify to be no breach of the law of the sabbath; because, in that case, and in such circumstances, it did not oblige: for the disciples being called to attend upon our Saviour, to be instructed by him in the things which concerned the kingdom of God; that is, in the doctrine of the gospel, which they were to publish to the world—this attendance hindered them from making necessary provisions against the sabbath, they, in obedience to their Master, being intent upon a better work; but that they might not starve, the necessities of nature must be provided for; and therefore it was fit, that the law of the sabbath, which was but positive and ritual, should give way to an act of mercy and self-preservation: "if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless."

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And the reason is the same as to any instrumental part of religion, by which I mean any thing which may be a means to promote piety and goodness; as prayer, hearing the word of God, keeping good company, and avoiding bad; the duties of this kind, our Saviour here in the text (where he likewise applies this rule), compares with moral duties. To avoid the company of vicious and wicked persons, is a good means to preserve men from the contagion of their vices, and was always esteemed a duty among prudent men, both Jews and heathens, and is no wise disallowed by our Saviour: but yet not so a duty as to hinder a greater duty, nor so strictly and perversely to be insisted upon, as if one ought not to converse with bad men in any case, or upon any account, no not for so great and good an end as to reclaim them from their vices. In this case we ought to consider, that our first and highest obligation is to moral duties, comprehended under the love of God and our neighbour; among which, one of the chief is to do good to men, and to shew mercy and pity to those that are in misery; and the greatest good that one man can do to another, is to be instrumental to reclaim him from the evil and error of his way; because this is "to save his soul from death;" and we cannot imagine that God ever intended, by any rule of prudence or positive constitution of the Jewish law, so to forbid their accompanying with bad and scandalous men, that it should be unlawful to converse with them in order to their recovery and amendment; "Go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

And St. Paul was of the same mind in the precepts he gives concerning avoiding the company of

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scandalous Christians: (2 Thess. iii. 14, 15.) "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." St. Paul qualifies his precept, lest Christians should mistake it, and fall into the Jewish extreme, not to converse with those whom they esteemed scandalous and wicked, upon any account whatsoever, no not in order to their amendment and reformation. The bond of intimacy and friendship with bad men ought to be broken, and yet the bond of common humanity may be as strong as ever. It is one thing to discountenance bad men, to bring them to shame, and a sense of their fault; and quite another thing to abandon them to ruin: and, even in case of notorious heresy, or wickedness of life, it is one thing to cut them off from the society and communion of Christians; and quite another, to cut them off from human society, to cut their throats, and to extirpate them out of the world.

And yet the matter was carried thus far by the furious zeal of the Jews, when Christianity first appeared in the world; they thought that no mercy in such cases was the best that could be done, and the best sacrifice that could be offered to Almighty God; and this pattern hath been since not only closely followed, but out-done by the doctrines and practices of the church of Rome; as we have too much reason to remember upon this day.*

But to proceed in the farther explication of the text, the meaning whereof, in short, is this: that the ritual and instrumental parts of religion, and all

* Preached on Nov. 5, 1688.

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laws and duties concerning them, are of less value and esteem with God, than those which are of a moral nature, especially the great duties and offices of piety and humanity, of the love of God and of our neighbour. And, if we consider the matter well, we shall see the reason of it to be very plain; because natural and moral duties are approved of God, for themselves and for their own sake, upon account of their own natural and intrinsical goodness; but the ritual and instrumental parts of religion are only pleasing to God in order to these, and so far as they tend to beget and promote them in us; they are not naturally good in themselves, but are instituted and appointed by God for the sake of the other; and therefore great reason there is that they should be subordinate, and give way to them, when they come in competition with one another.

For this is a known rule, which takes place in all laws, that laws of less importance should give way to those that are of greater; *quoties leges ex circumstantia colliduntur, ita ut utraque servari non potest, servanda est lex potior:* "Whenever two laws happen to be in such circumstances as to clash with one another, so that both of them cannot be observed, that law which is better and of greater consequence is to be kept." And Tully gives much the same rule in this matter: "In comparing of laws (says he) we are to consider which law is most useful and just, and reasonable to be observed." From whence it will follow, that when two laws, or more, or how many soever they be, cannot be observed, because they clash with one another; *ea maxime conservanda putetur, quæ ad maximas res pertinere videatur:* "It is reasonable that that law should be observed, which is of greatest moment and concernment."

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By what hath been said, we may learn what is the meaning of this saying, which our Saviour more than once cites out of the prophet; "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

From the words thus explained, I shall take occasion to prosecute the two propositions which I mentioned before; namely,

First, That natural religion is the foundation of instituted and revealed religion.

Secondly, That no instituted religion was ever designed to take away the obligation of natural duties; but is intended to establish and confirm them. And both these are sufficiently grounded in the reason of our Saviour's discourse from this rule, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

I. That natural religion is the foundation of instituted and revealed religion; and all revealed religion does suppose, and take for granted, the clear and undoubted principles and precepts of natural religion, and builds upon them. By natural religion, I mean obedience to the natural law, and the performance of such duties as natural light, without any express and supernatural revelation, doth dictate to men. These lie at the bottom of all religion, and are the great and fundamental duties which God requires of all mankind; as, that we should love God, and behave ourselves reverently towards him; that we should believe his revelations; and testify our dependance upon him, by imploring his aid and direction in all our necessities and distresses; and acknowledge our obligations to him for all the blessings and benefits which we receive; that we should moderate our appetites, in reference to the pleasures and enjoyments of this world, and use them temperately and chastely; that we should

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be just and upright in all our dealings with one another; true to our word, and faithful to our trust, and in all our words and actions observe that equity towards others, which we desire they should use towards us; that we should be kind and charitable, merciful and compassionate, one towards another; ready to do good to all, and apt not only to pity, but to relieve them in their misery and necessity. These, and such like, are those which we call moral duties; and they are of eternal and perpetual obligation, because they do naturally oblige, without any particular and express revelation from God. And these are the foundation of revealed and instituted religion, and all revealed religion does suppose them, and build upon them; for all revelation from God supposeth us to be men, and alters nothing of those duties to which we were naturally obliged before. And this will clearly appear if we consider these three things:

1. That the Scripture every where speaks of these as the main and fundamental duties of the Jewish religion.

2. That no instituted service of God, no positive part of religion, was ever acceptable to him, when these were neglected.

3. That the great design of the Christian religion, was to restore and reinforce the practice of the natural law.

1. That the Scripture every where speaks of these as the main and fundamental duties of the Jewish religion. When our Saviour was asked, which was the first and great commandment of the law; he answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour

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as thyself." One would have expected he would have given quite another answer, and have pitched upon some of those things which were so much magnified among the Jews, and which they laid so much weight upon; that he should have instanced in sacrifice, or circumcision, or the law of the sabbath: but he overlooks all these as inconsiderable in comparison, and instances only in those two great heads of moral duty—the love of God and our neighbour; which are of natural and perpetual obligation, and comprehend under them all other moral duties.

And these are those which our Saviour calls "the law and the prophets," and which he says he came not "to destroy, but to fulfil." (Matt. v. 17—20.) "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil: for verily I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

That our Saviour doth not here speak of the judicial or ceremonial law of the Jews, but of the duties of the moral law, will, I think, be very plain, from these following considerations:

First, That the judicial or ceremonial laws of the Jews were to pass away, and did so, not long after; but this law which our Saviour speaks of, was to be

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perpetual, and immutable; for he tells us—that heaven and earth should pass away, but one jot or one tittle of this law should not pass.

Secondly, The observation of the law our Saviour speaks of, consisted in such things as the scribes and pharisees neglected; for he tells his disciples, upon this occasion, that except their righteousness did exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, they should "in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." But now the scribes and pharisees were the most accurate and punctual people in the world, in observing the precepts of the judicial and ceremonial law; they were so far from taking away any thing from these observances, that they had added to them, and enlarged them, by innumerable traditions of their own; so exact were they, that they would "pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin," as our Saviour observes; but then they were extremely defective in moral duties: they were unnatural to their parents, and would pretend that their estates were consecrated to God; that, under this pretence of positive religion, they might excuse themselves from a natural duty, and let their parents starve for God's sake; they were covetous, and unjust, and devoured widows' houses; in a word, our Saviour tells us, they neglected "the weightier matters of the law, mercy, judgment, and the love of God," and keeping faith with men: so that it is in these things, that our Saviour means, that our righteousness must "exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees," viz. in the practice of moral duties, which were neglected by them; and, consequently, it is the moral law which our Saviour came to confirm and establish.

Thirdly, If we consider the instances which our

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Saviour gives in his following discourse, by which we may best judge what he means. He instances in murder, and adultery, and perjury, which are undoubtedly forbidden by the natural law; and then he instances in several permissions which were indulged to them for the hardness of their hearts, but yet did intrench upon the dictates of right reason, and the first and original constitution of things; as the permission of divorce upon every slight occasion, and of revenge, and retaliation of injuries.

Fourthly, If we consider that, by "the law and the prophets" our Saviour means that which was principally designed and ultimately intended by them; which was the observation of moral duties; which as they were written in the two tables by the immediate finger of God himself, so are chiefly inculcated by the prophets. And so we find this phrase of "the law and the prophets" elsewhere used by our Saviour, when he mentions that great rule of equity, that—we should do to others as we would have them do to us. (Matt. vii. 12.) "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." But how was this "the law and the prophets," when this rule was never so much as mentioned in either? our Saviour means, that this is the foundation of all those duties of justice and mercy, which are so much inculcated in "the law and the prophets."

So that our Saviour makes the observation of moral duties to be the principal design of the Jewish law, and as it were the foundation of it; and therefore he calls moral duties, τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου, "the weightier matters of the law." (Matt. xxiii. 23.) "But ye (says he to the scribes and pharisees) have

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neglected the weightier things of the law, judgment, and mercy, and fidelity." The scribes and pharisees busied themselves chiefly about ritual observances; but our Saviour tells them, that those other were the most considerable and important duties of the law, and lay at the bottom of the Jewish religion. And much the same enumeration the prophet makes, where he compares sacrifices and these moral duties together: (Mic. vi. 6, 7, 8.) "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" He had required sacrifices, but had no regard to them in comparison with these.

2. No instituted service of God, no positive part of religion whatsoever, was ever acceptable to God, when moral duties were neglected; nay, so far from being acceptable to him, that he rejects them with disdain and abhorrence. To this purpose there are almost innumerable passages in the prophets, (Isa. i. 11, &c.) "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting; and when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: when ye make many prayers, I will

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not hear." What is the reason of all this? because they were defective in the moral duties of religion; so it follows; "your hands are full of blood; wash ye, make ye clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow; come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord;" implying that, till they had respect to moral duties, all their external worship and sacrifices signified nothing. And so likewise, (Isa. lxvi. 3.) he tells them that nothing could be more abominable than their sacrifices, so long as they allowed themselves in wicked practices; "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; and he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol; yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations." And to mention but one text more out of the Old Testament, (Jer. vii. 4, 5.) "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. Throughly amend your ways and doings, throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood." If they did not practise these duties, and forbear those sins, all the reverence for the temple and worship of God signifies nothing. You see, in the Jewish religion, what it was that was acceptable to God for itself and its own sake; viz. the practice of moral duties; and that all instituted religion, that did not promote and further these, or was destitute of them, was abominable to God. And under the gospel our

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Saviour prefers a moral duty before any gift we can offer to God, and will have it to take place, (Matt. v. 23, 24.) "If thou bring thy gift unto the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

But it should seem by this, and what hath been said before, that God prefers goodness and righteousness to men, before his own worship: and obedience to the precepts of the second table, before obedience to those of the first.

But this does but seem so; all that can be collected from this passage of our Saviour, or any thing that hath been already said, are only these two things.

1. That God prefers the practice of the moral duties of the second table, before any instituted worship, such as sacrifice was; and before obedience to the laws of religion, which are merely positive, though they do immediately concern the worship of God.

2. That if we neglect the duties of the second table, of goodness and righteousness towards men, God will not accept of our obedience to the precepts of the first, nor of any act of religious worship that we can perform. This our Saviour means when he says, "Leave there thy gift before the altar; first be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift;" intimating that, so long as we bear a revengeful mind towards our brethren, God will not accept of any gift or sacrifice that we can offer to him; or, indeed, of any act of religious worship that we can perform.

3. The great design of the Christian religion is to restore and reinforce the practice of the natural

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law, or, which is all one, of moral duties; and therefore our Saviour begins his first sermon, by promising blessedness to the practice of these duties; of purity, and meekness, and righteousness, and peaceableness, and mercifulness, and patience, and submission to the will of God, under persecutions and sufferings for righteousness sake; and tells us (as I shewed before) that he came not to release men from the practice of these duties, but to oblige them thereto more effectually; and that as these were "the law and the prophets," that is, the main duties and the foundation of the Jewish religion, so were they much more to be so of the Christian. This the Scriptures of the New Testament do every where declare to be the great design of the gospel, and the Christian religion, to instruct us in these duties, and to engage us effectually to the practice of them. In that known and excellent text, (Tit. ii. 11, 12.) "The grace of God (which is in and by the doctrine of the gospel) hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." And herein St. James tells us, the true nature, and the force and virtue of the Christian religion doth consist: (James i. 27.) "Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world." And, (chap. iii. 17.) "The wisdom which is from above (that is, that heavenly and Divine knowledge revealed to us by the gospel) hath these properties, and is apt to produce these effects; it is first pure, and then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and of good fruits.

And the planting of these dispositions in us is that

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which the Scripture calls the new creature, and the image of God. (Eph. iv. 20, &c.) The apostle, speaking there of the vices and lusts wherein the gentiles lived, tells Christians that they were otherwise instructed by the gospel: "But you have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;" or (as the words perhaps may be better rendered) in the holiness of truth; for it immediately follows: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour."

And this is that which the apostle elsewhere makes to be all in all in the Christian religion. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." (Gal. vi. 15.) Which the apostle in the chapter before expresseth thus: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh (or is inspired) by charity." And yet more expressly: (1 Cor. vii. 19.) "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God." By the comparing of which texts, it appears that the main thing in Christianity is the practice of moral duties; and this is the new creature, and this the proper effect of the Christian faith, to produce these virtues in us. And, indeed, the great design of the Christian religion, and every thing in it, of the love of God in giving his Son to die for us, of the pardon of our sins and justification in his blood, of all the promises

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and threatenings of the gospel, and of the assistance therein promised, is to engage and encourage, and enable to the practice of moral duties.

And thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to speak to; namely, that natural religion is the foundation of instituted and revealed religion; and all revealed religion does suppose it, and builds upon it. I proceed to the

II. Second, namely, That no revealed and instituted religion was ever designed to take away the obligation of natural duties, but was intended to confirmand establish them. And this also will be evident, if we consider these three things:

1. That all revealed religion calls men to the practice of natural duties. This the Jewish religion did. The first laws which God gave them, and which he distinguished from the rest, by writing them in tables of stone with his own finger, were the precepts of the moral law. And the great business of the prophets, whom God raised up among them, from time to time, was to reprove not so much their defects in their sacrifices, and in the duties of instituted worship, as the breach of the natural law by their vices and immoralities; and to threaten them with the judgments of God, if they did not reform and amend their faults.

And now, under the gospel, the preceptive part of it is almost wholly made up of moral duties; namely, those which are comprehended under those two great commandments, of the love of God and our neighbour. In the Christian religion there is very little that is merely positive and instituted, besides the two sacraments, and praying to God in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ.

2. The most perfect revelation that ever God made

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to mankind (I mean that of the Christian religion), doth furnish us with the best help and advantages for the performance of moral duties; it discovers our duty more clearly to us; it offers us the greatest assistance to enable us to the performance of it; it presents us with the most powerful motives and arguments to engage us thereto; so that this revelation of the gospel is so far from wakening the obligation of natural duties, that it confirms and strengthens it, and urgeth us more forcibly to the practice of them.

3. The positive rites and institutions of revealed religion are so far from intrenching upon the laws of nature, that they were always designed to be subordinate and subservient to them; and, whenever they come in competition, it is the declared will of God, that positive institutions should give way to natural duties; and this I have shewn to be plainly the meaning of this saying in the text, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." If circumstances be such that one part of religion must give place, God will have the ritual and instituted part to give way to that which is natural and moral.

It is very frequent in Scripture, when the duties of natural religion and rites of Divine institution come in competition, to slight and disparage these in comparison of moral duties, and to speak of them as things which God hath no pleasure in; and which, in comparison with the other, he will hardly own that he hath commanded. "When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands?" (Isa. i. 12.) "Thou desirest not sacrifice, thou delightest not in burnt-offerings." (Psal. li. 16.) "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? He hath shewed

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thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy?"

But God no where makes any comparison to the disadvantage of natural duties; he never derogated from them in any case; he never said he would have such a thing, and not mercy; or that he had rather such a rite of religion should be performed, than that men should do the greatest good, and shew the greatest charity to one another. It is no where made a question, will the Lord be pleased that we deal justly every man with his neighbour, and speak the truth one to another? that we be kind and tender-hearted, and ready to forgive? that we be willing to distribute and give alms to those that are in need? There is no question as this put in Scripture; nay, it is positive in these matters, that "with such sacrifices God is well pleased." I instance in this virtue more especially of kindness and compassion, because it is one of the prime instances of moral duties; as sacrifice is put for all the ritual and instituted part of religion, and this disposition of mind our Saviour makes the root of all moral duties; "love is the fulfilling of the law:" and the apostle speaks of it as the great end and scope of the gospel; "the end of the commandment is charity." And this temper and disposition of mind he advanceth above knowledge, and faith, and hope; "the greatest of these is charity;" and without this he will not allow a man to be any thing in Christianity: this he makes our highest perfection and attainment, and that which abides and remains in the future state: "charity never fails."

This our Saviour most effectually recommends to us, both in his doctrine and by his example; this

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he presseth as a peculiar law of his religion, and the proper mark and character of a disciple. This he requires us to exercise towards those who practise the contrary towards us; "to love our enemies, and to do good to them that hate us." And of this he hath given us the greatest example that ever was: "when we were enemies to him," he loved us so as hardly ever any man did his friend, so as "to lay down his life for us;" and he instituted the sacrament for a memorial of his love to mankind, and to put us in mind how we ought to love one another.

And now the application of what hath been said upon this argument, to the occasion of this day, is very obvious; and there are two very natural inferences from it.

First, From what hath been said upon this argument, it plainly appears what place natural and moral duties ought to have in the Christian religion: and, of all natural duties, mercy and goodness. This is so primary a duty of human nature, so great and considerable a part of religion, that all positive institutions must give way to it; and nothing of that kind can cancel the obligation of it, nor justify the violation of this great and natural law. Our blessed Saviour, in his religion, hath declared nothing to the prejudice of it; but, on the contrary, hath heightened our obligation to it as much as is possible, by telling us, that "the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

So that they know not what manner of spirit they are of who will kill men to do God service; and, to advance his cause and religion in the world, will break through all obligations of nature, and civil society, and disturb the peace of mankind.

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Nor did our Saviour, by any thing in his religion, design to release men from the obligation of natural and civil duties. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the pope, but yet he deposed none of the princes of this world, nor did absolve their subjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their opposition to his religion: he assumed no such power to himself (no, not *in ordine ad spiritualia*), nor, that ever we read of, did he give it to any other. Whence, then, comes his pretended vicar to have this authority? And yet the horrid attempt of this day was first designed, and afterwards carried on, in prosecution of the pope's bull of excommunication; and was not so much the effect of the despair and discontent of that party, here in England, as the natural consequence of their doctrines of extirpating heretics and deposing kings, and absolving subjects from their allegiance to them.

No zeal for any positive institution in religion can justify the violation of the natural law, the precepts whereof are of primary and indispensable obligation. The pope's supremacy is not so clear as the duty of obedience to civil government; nor is transubstantiation so plainly revealed in Scripture, as it is, both in nature and Scripture, that we should "do no murder." And yet how many thousands have been put to death, because they could not understand this hard word, and believe this impossible thing! And yet, if the supremacy of the pope were clearly of Divine right, and the doctrine of transubstantiation as plain as the institution of the sacrament, yet, these being but positive matters in religion, there would be no reason to kill men for not understanding and believing these things; nay, it would be contrary to religion to do it; because the law of

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mercy and humanity, which is the law of nature, ought not to be violated for the promoting of any positive institution; and God hath plainly said, that "he will have mercy rather than sacrifice;" yea, rather than the sacrifice of the mass, if it were, what they pretend it is, the offering of the natural body and blood of Christ; because it would be needless: for propitiation of sin being once made by Christ's offering himself once for all upon the cross, there needs no more sacrifice for sin. Nay, I will go further yet: I had rather never administer the sacrament, nor ever receive it, than take away any man's life about it; because the sacrament is but a positive rite and institution of the Christian religion, and God prefers mercy, which is a duty of natural religion, before any rite or institution whatsoever. Besides that, all acts of malice and cruelty are directly contrary to the particular nature and design of this blessed sacrament, which is to commemorate the sufferings of the Son of God for our sakes, and to give us an example of the greatest love that ever was, and thereby to excite us to the imitation of it.

2. What hath been said, gives us a right notion and character of that church and religion, which prefers the positive rites and institutions of religion, and the observance of them, to those duties which are of natural and eternal obligation, mercy and goodness, fidelity and justice; and which, for the sake of a pretended article of religion, or rite of worship (which, if it were certain that they were revealed and instituted by God, are yet merely positive), will break the greatest of God's commandments, and teach men so.

It is too plain to be denied, that the principles and precepts of natural religion were never so effec-

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tually undermined, and the morality of the Christian religion never so intolerably corrupted and debauched, by any thing that ever had the face of religion in the world, as by the allowed doctrines and practices of the church of Rome; and this out of a blind and furious zeal for some imaginary doctrines and rites of the Christian religion; which, at the best, are of mere positive institution, and of the same rank among Christians, that sacrifices were in the Jewish religion. For which we need go no further for an instance, than in the occasion of this day's solemnity; upon which day (about fourscore years ago), there was designed a mighty sacrifice indeed, the greatest and richest burnt-offering that ever was pretended to be offered up to Almighty God, by those of any religion whatsoever; not the blood of bulls and goats, but of king, and princes, and nobles, more in value than "thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil;" than "all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills."

Here was a prodigious sacrifice indeed; but where was mercy? the thing God chiefly desires, and which, above all other things, is acceptable to him: no mercy, not even to those of their own religion, whom these nice and tender casuists, after a solemn debate of the case, had resolved to involve in the same common destruction with the rest;—rather no mercy, than that this sacrifice, which their mad zeal had prompted them to, should be omitted.

To conclude: they that can do such inhuman things, and think them to be religion, do not understand the nature of it, but had need to be taught the first rudiments of natural religion; that natural duties are not to be violated upon pretence; no, not for the sake of positive institutions; because natural

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religion is the foundation of that which is instituted; and, therefore, to violate any natural duty, for the sake of that which is instituted, is for religion to undermine and blow up itself! Let those who do such things, and teach men so, go and learn what that meaneth—"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

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SERMON CIII.

CHRISTIANITY DOTH NOT DESTROY, BUT PERFECT, THE LAW OF MOSES.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. —MATT. v. 17.

THERE is no saying in the whole gospel which the Jews did so frequently object to the Christians as this of our blessed Saviour, as if his words and actions were plainly repugnant and contrary to one another: for when it is evident, say they, that he took away so many ceremonies, purifications, distinctions of meats, sacrifices, judicial laws, and many other things; yet he says, he came not "to destroy the law or the prophets;" so that it is plain that he did throw down the law of Moses, and in so doing contradicted his own saying, that he did not intend "to destroy the law." To clear our Saviour's words of this objection, it will be requisite to consider the scope and design of his discourse in this chapter, by which we shall fully understand the sense and meaning of these words in the text.

Our Saviour, in this sermon (which contains the sum and substance of his religion) doth earnestly recommend to his disciples and followers, and strictly enjoins the perfect practice of, all goodness and virtue, declaring to them, that he came to bring in and establish that righteousness which the Jewish religion indeed aimed at, but, through the weakness and imperfection of that dispensation, was not able

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to effect and accomplish. And to take away all suspicion of a design to contradict the former revelations of God, made to the Jews by Moses and the prophets, or to destroy their Divine authority, by carrying on a design contrary to them; I say to prevent any imagination of this kind, he does here, in the text, expressly declare the contrary: "Think not," &c. intimating that some either did, or at least might be apt to suspect, that his design was to destroy the obligation of the law, and to undermine the authority of Moses and the prophets: to free them from this jealousy, he declares plainly, that he had no such thought and intention—it was far from him.

"I come not to destroy," καταλῦσαι, to abrogate, or dissolve the law, to encourage men to the breach and violation of it; for the word is of the same sense with λῦειν, at the nineteenth verse. "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments;" and with καταργῆσαι, (Rom. iii. 31.) νόμον οὖν καταργοῦμεν; "Do we then make void the law by faith?" which is the same question with that of the same apostle, (Gal. iii. 21.) "Is the law then against the promises of God?" that is, are the law and gospel contrary? do they contradict one another? So that the meaning of our Saviour's declaration is this: that he was not come to dissolve and abrogate and make void the law, or to encourage men to the breach of it; that the precepts of his religion were in no wise contrary to those of the law and the prophets, did not thwart and oppose them, or any ways contradict the main design and intention of the law and the prophets, that is, of the Jewish religion; for so "the law and the prophets" do frequently signify: (Matt. vii. 12.) "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would

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that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets;" that is, this is the main scope and intention of what your religion, contained in "the law and the prophets," teacheth concerning your duty to one another. So, likewise, (Matt. xxii. 40.) "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets;" that is, this is the sum of all the duties of religion; to these two laws, all that the Jewish religion teacheth may be referred. "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil;" to carry on the same design which was intended by the Jewish religion, and to perfect and accomplish it; to supply all the defects and weaknesses and imperfections of that dispensation: this is the plain meaning of this caution and declaration of our Saviour's—"Think not," &c.

For the clearing of this matter, viz. That the design of our Saviour's doctrine and religion is not contrary to those former revelations, which God made to the Jews by Moses and the prophets; this will evidently appear, whether we consider the prophecies and predictions of the Old Testament, or the laws and precepts therein contained.

First, The prophecies and predictions of the Old Testament: our Saviour came not to contradict and overthrow these; but to fulfil them. The chief predictions of "the law and the prophets" were concerning the Messias and his spiritual kingdom. In the law it was foretold, that—God would raise to them a prophet like unto Moses, whom they ought to hear and obey; and to him all the prophets of the Old Testament gave witness—foretelling the time of his coming, his extraction, the manner and circumstances of his birth, the purity and efficacy of his doctrine, the actions and miracles of his life, his

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passion, death, and burial, with the particular circumstances of them, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; so that this part of "the law and prophets" he did accomplish and fulfil in a most eminent and remarkable manner: all things that the prophets had foretold, concerning the Messias, were punctually made good in the person, and actions, and sufferings of our Saviour.

Secondly, As to the laws and precepts of the Jewish religion, the doctrine and the laws of Christianity did not clash with them; nor properly abrogate them, and make them void, especially as to the moral precepts, which were the very life and spirit, the ultimate scope and design of that religion; nay, so far was it from doing so, that the main and proper intention of Christianity, was to clear and establish that which was the main design of "the law and prophets," to perfect the law in this part, and to raise and advance morality to its highest pitch, to supply all the defects and imperfections of the Jewish religion, and to make men much better than that weak and imperfect institution was able to do. This was the great design of Christianity; and it is very probable that our Saviour had a principal if not a sole respect to the precepts of the moral law, when he here says, that "he came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to perfect and fulfil them;" as I shall have occasion by and by to shew more at large.

But that we may give a full answer to the objection of the Jews against this saying of our Saviour's, I shall shew that he did not come to thwart and contradict, and properly to abrogate and make void the Jewish law, in any part of it, neither the civil and judicial, nor the ritual and ceremonial,

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much less the moral and natural precepts of it. This is more than I think to be absolutely necessary, to reconcile this saying of our Saviour with the rest of his doctrine and actions; for though he had properly abrogated the ceremonial law, and in no sense fulfilled it; yet, notwithstanding this, it may be true, that "he came not to destroy the law and the prophets;" that is, to destroy the obligation of moral duties, which he speaks of in this chapter, and elsewhere declares to be the ultimate scope, the sum and substance of "the law and the prophets;" for if the ceremonial law was not designed by God to be perpetual, but to give way to a more perfect dispensation; then our Saviour did no way thwart and contradict "the law and the prophets;" by abrogating the ceremonial law, at that time, when God designed that a period should be put to it. But yet, for the fuller satisfaction to this objection, I shall shew that our Saviour did not properly abrogate any part of the Jewish law, no, not the ritual and ceremonial part of it; but did fulfil it.

First, Not their civil and judicial laws. These, in the original intention of them, were not laws designed for mankind, but suited and fitted to the disposition and temper, the condition and circumstances, of a particular people and nation; to these our Saviour taught obedience, and paid it himself, and never did any thing contrary to them, nor in the least weaken the obligation of them; but they continued in full force, until that nation and commonwealth was dissolved. So that these laws were no way impeached or abrogated by the Christian religion; but they fell for want of a subject to exercise their power upon, and because the people that were to be governed by them were destroyed or dis-

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dipated; and though they neither are, nor ever were, obligatory to other nations, as given by Moses, and as they were the peculiar laws of a particular nation; yet the natural reason and equity of them, so far as it concerned mankind, is duly considered and regarded by us, and many of these laws are adopted into the laws of most Christian nations. It is plain, then, that this part of the Jewish law received no prejudice by Christianity, but continued in full force, so long as that nation and commonwealth lasted, which was to be governed by it.

Secondly, As to the ritual and ceremonial part of the Jewish law, which consisted in circumcision, and purifications, and sacrifices, in distinction of meats, and times, and innumerable other rites and observances; this was not properly abrogated and made void by the coming of Christ, but fulfilled and made good by him. The rites and ceremonies of the law, were the types and shadows of those future good things which were promised under the gospel; a kind of rude draught of a better and more perfect institution, which was designed, and at last finished and perfected by the Christian religion. This account the apostle gives of the legal rites and observances: (Col. ii. 16, 17.) "Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ;" that is, he is the substance and reality of all those things, which were shadowed and figured by those legal observances. And so the apostle to the Hebrews calls the priests and sacrifices of the law, the "examples and shadows of heavenly things," (chap. viii. 5.) and (so chap. x. 1.) "the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very

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image of the things;" that is, being but an obscure type, and not a perfect representation of the blessings and benefits of the gospel, which we now have in truth and reality. Now reason will tell us, that the laws concerning these types and shadows, were only to continue till the substance of the things signified by them should come, and that they would be of no longer use, when that more perfect institution, which was figured by them, should take place, and then they would expire, and become void of themselves; because the reason and use of them ceasing, they must necessarily fall.

But they did not expire immediately upon the coming of Christ, and therefore he himself submitted to these laws, so long as they continued in force; he was circumcised, and presented in the temple, and performed all other rites required by the law; that first covenant to which these laws and ordinances belonged, continuing in force till the ratification of the second covenant by the death of Christ, and then these laws expired, or rather were fulfilled, and had their accomplishment in the sacrifice of Christ, which made all the sacrifices and other rites of the Jewish religion needless, and of no use for the future; Christ having, by this "one sacrifice of himself, perfected for ever them that are sanctified," as the same apostle speaks. (Heb. x. 14.) So that Christ did not properly abrogate and repeal those ritual and ceremonial laws; but they, having continued as long as they were designed to do, and there was any use of them, they abated and ceased of themselves.

And that the death of Christ was the time of their expiration, because then the new covenant took place, St. Paul expressly tells us: (Eph. ii. 15.)

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" having abolished or voided in his flesh the law of commandments contained in ordinances;" and this, (ver. 16.) he is said to have done by his cross; and, more plainly, (Col. ii. 14.) " blotting out the handwriting of ordinances, which was against us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

So that ye see that even the ceremonial law was not so properly abrogated by the sacrifice and death of Christ, but rather had its accomplishment, and attained its end, in the sacrifice of Christ; which by the eternal efficacy of it to the expiation of sin, and the purifying of our consciences, hath made all the sacrifices and washings, and other rites of the ceremonial law, for ever needless and superfluous.

Thirdly, But especially as to the moral law, and those precepts which are of natural and perpetual obligation, our Saviour did not come either to dissolve, or to lessen and slacken the obligation of them.

And of this I told you our Saviour doth principally, if not solely, speak here in the text, as will appear to any one that shall attentively consider the scope of his discourse. In the beginning of his sermon he promiseth blessing to those, and those only, who were endowed with those virtues which are required by the precepts of the moral law, or comprehended in them; and then he tells them, that Christians must be very eminent and conspicuous for the practice of them: (ver. 16.) " Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven:" and then he cautions them not to entertain any such imaginations, as if he intended to dissolve the obligation of the law, and to free men from the practice of moral duties, which probably some might have suggested against him: " Think not that I am come

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to destroy the law and the prophets;" as if he had said—you cannot entertain any such conceit, if you consider that the precepts, of which I inculcate upon you, and those virtues, the practice whereof I recommend to you, are the same which are contained in the law and the prophets. So that I am so far from crossing the main design of the law and the prophets, and taking away the obligation of moral duties enjoined by the Jewish religion, that I come purposely to carry on the same design to further perfection, to give a more perfect and clear law, and to give a greater enforcement and encouragement to the practice of moral duties: these were always the sum and substance of religion, the ultimate design of the law and the prophets; and therefore I am so far from discharging men from the obligation of the moral precepts of the law, that I come to bind them more strongly upon you. And, "verily I say unto you," that is, I solemnly declare, "that whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven;" that is, he shall in no wise enter therein. You think the scribes and pharisees very pious and excellent men, and to have attained to a high pitch of righteousness; "but I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." And then he instanceth in several precepts of the moral law, which in the letter of them, especially as they were interpreted by the teachers of the law among the Jews, were very much short of that righteousness and perfection which he now requires of his disciples and followers. So that his whole discourse is about precepts and obligations of the mo-

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ral law, and not a word concerning the ritual and ceremonial law; which makes me very prone to think, that our Saviour's meaning in the text is this, that his religion was so far from thwarting and opposing that which was the main design of "the law and the prophets," that is, of the Jewish religion, that the principal intention of Christianity was to advance the practice of goodness and virtue, by strengthening the obligation of moral duties, and giving us a more perfect law and rule of life, and offering better arguments and greater encouragements to the obedience of this law. Therefore, for the fuller explication and illustration of this matter, I shall endeavour to clear these three points:

First, That the main and ultimate design of "the law and the prophets," was to engage men to the practice of moral duties; that is, of real and substantial goodness.

Secondly, That the law of Moses, or the dispensation of the Jewish religion, was comparatively very weak and insufficient to this purpose.

Thirdly, That the Christian religion hath supplied all the defects, and weaknesses, and imperfections of that dispensation. These three particulars will fully clear our Saviour's meaning in this text.

First, That the main and ultimate design of "the law and the prophets," was to engage men to the practice of moral duties; that is, of real and substantial goodness, consisting in those virtues which our Saviour mentions at the beginning of this sermon; humility, and meekness, and mercy, and righteousness, and purity, and peaceableness. This our Saviour more than once tells us was the sum and substance, the main scope and design of the whole doctrine of "the law and the prophets:" (Matt.

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vii. 12.) "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them; for this is the law and the prophets." (And Matt. xxii. 40.) That the love of God and our neighbour, those two great commands, to which all moral duties are reduced, are the two great hinges of the Jewish religion; on these two hang all "the law and the prophets." St. Paul calls love, "the fulfilling of the whole law;" (Rom. xiii. 10.) St. James, "the perfect and the royal law," as that which hath a sovereign influence upon all parts of religion. And therefore the apostle (Rom. iii. 21.) tells us, that this more perfect righteousness which was brought in by the gospel, or the Christian religion, is witnessed by "the law and the prophets." And, indeed, the prophets every where do slight and undervalue the ritual and ceremonial part of religion, in comparison of the practice of moral duties: (Isa. i. 11.) "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? bring no more vain oblations; your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth." But what then are the things that are acceptable to God? He tells us at the 16th verse: "Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." And by the prophet Jeremiah, God tells that people, that the business of sacrifices was not the thing primarily designed by God, but obedience to the moral law; the ritual law came in upon occasion, for the prevention of idolatry, and by way of condescension to the temper of that people; and thus Maimonides and the learned Jews understood these words: (Jer. vii. 22, 23.) "I spake not unto your fathers, nor

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commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and walk in all the ways that I have commanded, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." So likewise, in the prophet Hosea, God plainly prefers the moral before the ritual part of religion, as that which was principally designed and intended by him: (Hos. vi. 6.) "I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings;" but most plainly and expressly, (Mic. vi. 6.) "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousand of rivers of oil? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" These, it seems, were the great things which God stood upon, and required of men even under that imperfect dispensation; and these are the very things which the Christian religion doth so strictly enjoin and command; so that this righteousness, which the gospel requires, was witnessed to by "the law and the prophets." I proceed to the

Second point, That the law of Moses, or the dispensation of the Jewish religion, was comparatively very weak, and insufficient to make men truly good, and for the promoting of real and inward righteousness: it gave laws, indeed, to this purpose, but those not so clear and perfect, or at least not so clearly understood, as they are now under the gospel; and it made no express promises of inward grace and assistance, to quicken and strengthen us in the doing of our duty; it made no explicit pro-

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mises of any blessing and reward to the doing of our duty beyond this life; so that the best and most powerful arguments and encouragements to obedience, were either wholly wanting, or very obscurely revealed under this dispensation.

And this insufficiency of the Jewish dispensation, both to our justification and sanctification, to the reconciling of us to God, and the making of us really good, the apostle frequently inculcates in the New Testament: (St. Paul, Acts xiii. 38, 39.) "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses; and, (Rom. viii. 3.) "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh;" that is, by reason of the carnality of that dispensation, consisting in the purification of the body: (Gal. iii. 21.) he calls it a law unfit to give life: "If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law." And the apostle to the Hebrews, (chap. viii. 6, 7, 8, &c.) finds fault with the dispensation of the law, for the lowness and meanness of its promises, being only of temporal good things; and for want of conferring an inward and a powerful principle to enable men to obedience; "but now hath he obtained (speaking of Christ) a more excellent ministry, by how much, also, he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises; for if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for a second;" and this second and better covenant, he tells us, was foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament; for, finding fault with them,

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he saith, " Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers. For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts. And (chap. x. 1. 4.) he shews the inefficacy of their sacrifices for the real expiation of sin: " The law having but a shadow of good things to come, and not the lively representation of the things themselves, can never, with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect; for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins."

I should now have proceeded to the third particular; namely, that the Christian religion hath supplied all the defects, and weakness, and imperfection of the Jewish dispensation; but that I shall not now enter upon, but make one plain inference from the substance of what I have already discoursed upon this argument.

If our Saviour came not to dissolve and loosen the obligation of moral duties, but to confirm and establish it, and to enforce and bind the practice of these duties more strongly upon us, then they do widely and wilfully mistake the design of Christianity, who teach that it dischargeth men from the obligation of the moral law, which is the fundamental and avowed principle of the antinomian doctrine, but directly contrary to this declaration of our Saviour in the text: " That he came not to destroy the law and the prophets," but to perfect and fulfil them; (for to take away the obligation of

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a law, is plainly to destroy and make it void;) and contrary to the apostle's solemn resolution of this matter: (Rom. iii. 31.) "Do we then make void the law through faith?" that is, does the gospel destroy and take away the obligation of the law? "God forbid; yea, we establish the law; the Christian religion is so far from designing or doing any such thing, that it gives new strength and force to it.

But surely they that teach this doctrine, did never duly consider that terrible threatening of our Saviour, after the text, which seems to be so directly levelled at them: "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven;" for how can men more effectually teach the violation, not only of the least, but of the greatest of God's commandments, than by declaring that the gospel hath set men free from the obligation of the moral law? which is, in effect, to say, that Christians may act contrary to all the duties of morality; that is, do the most impious things in the world without any offence against God; and, notwithstanding this, continue to be his children, and highly in the favour of God.

And all the security they have against this impious consequence is, that weak and slender pretence, that gratitude and love to God will preserve them from making this ill use of the grace of the gospel, and oblige them to abstain from sin, and to endeavour to please God as much as any law could do. But then they do not consider the nonsense of this: for there can be no such thing as sin, if the obligation of the law be taken away; for "where there is no law there can be no transgression," as the apostle, and common reason likewise, tell us; so that

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the law being removed and taken away, all actions become indifferent, and one thing is not more a sin, or offence against God, than another. And what, then, is it they mean, that gratitude will oblige men to, or preserve them from? when there can be no such thing as sin or duty, as pleasing or offending God, if there be no law to oblige us to the one, or restrain us from the other.

And what is, if this be not, "to turn the grace of God into wantonness," and to make Christian liberty a cloak for all sorts of sins? A man cannot do a greater despite to the Christian religion, nor take a more effectual course to bring it into contempt, and to make it to be hissed out of the world, than to represent it as a lewd and licentious doctrine, which gives men a perfect discharge from all the duties of morality, and obligeth them only to believe confidently, that Christ hath purchased for them a liberty to do what they will; and that, upon these terms, and no other, they are secured of the favour of God in this world, and eternal salvation in the other. This is the sum, and the plain result, of the antinomian doctrine, the most pernicious heresy, and most directly destructive of the great end and design of Christianity, that ever yet was broached in the world. "But ye have not so learned Christ," if so be ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, "as the truth is in Jesus; that ye put off, concerning your former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

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SERMON CIV.

CHRISTIANITY DOTH NOT DESTROY, BUT PERFECT THE LAW OF MOSES.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. —MATT. v. 17.

I HAVE considered this saying of our Saviour's with respect to the moral law, and those precepts which are of natural and perpetual force, and that our Saviour did not come either to dissolve or loosen the obligation of them; for the illustration of which, I propounded to clear these three points:

First, That the main and ultimate design of "the law and the prophets," was to engage men to the practice of royal duties; that is, of real and substantial goodness.

Secondly, That the law of Moses, or the dispensation of the Jewish religion, was comparatively very weak and insufficient to make men truly good, and ineffectual to promote and reward real righteousness. These two points I have spoken to. I shall now proceed to the

Third, namely, That the Christian religion doth supply all the defects, and weaknesses, and imperfections of the Jewish dispensation.

The Jewish religion had very considerable advantages above the mere light of nature, which was all that the heathen world had to conduct them towards eternal happiness; the Jews had the know-

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ledge of the one true God, and very signal and particular testimonies of the Divine Providence, which did naturally tend to beget in them good hopes of a future life, and the rewards of another world; they had the natural law revealed, and the main precepts of it written with God's own hand, and by Moses delivered to them; by which means they had a more certain and distinct knowledge of their duty: they had prophets frequently sent to them, to admonish them of their duty, and to exhort them to repentance, and to warn them of approaching judgments. They had good encouragement given to hope for the pardon of sin, by God's appointment of several ways of expiation; which, how unlikely soever they were to be available to the effectual expiation of sin, yet they did signify, that the Divine nature was placable, and did seem to figure some more effectual way, designed by God for that purpose, that should be exhibited in due time. And, finally, they had most express promises and threatenings of temporal blessings and judgments, to encourage them in their obedience, and to deter them from the transgression of God's laws. These advantages the Jews plainly had above the rest of the world; God did not deal so with other nations, neither had the heathen such a knowledge of God's laws.

But notwithstanding this, the Jewish religion was very short and defective, very weak and ineffectual to the great end of righteousness and true holiness, and to raise men to that perfection of goodness, of which human nature, through the grace of God, is capable; and therefore there wanted a more perfect institution, to supply the defects, and weakness, and imperfection even of that Divine revelation which

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God had made to the Jews, and really to effect and accomplish that which the Jewish religion attempted and aimed at, and was but, as I may say, rudely begun, under that imperfect institution. And this the gospel, or the Christian religion revealed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, hath fully effected, as will evidently appear by a particular survey and consideration of the main defects of the Jewish religion, which I shall shew to be all perfectly made up by the revelation of the gospel, and the doctrine of Christianity, in these following particulars.

First, It was a great defect of the Jewish religion, that a considerable part of it was merely external, concerning the purification of the body and the flesh, and only figurative of that inward purity and real righteousness, which renders men truly good, and like to God; for which reason the Jewish institution is by the apostle to the Hebrews called the law of a carnal commandment: (Heb. vii. 16; and chap. ix. 10.) is said to consist only (that is chiefly) "in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation;" that is, till the Messias should come and give such laws as should really tend to reform the hearts and lives of men; and therefore these laws and ordinances are called poor pitiful elements, and the rudiments of the world, fitted rather for children in understanding and goodness, than to bring men to any maturity and perfection in goodness. All their rites of purification did only sanctify to the purifying of the flesh; but did not purge the conscience from dead works, as the apostle to the Hebrews speaks, (chap. ix. 13, 14.) "they could not make those that performed and observed them perfect, as pertaining to the con-

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science;" (ver. 9.) that is, these laws had no effect upon the minds of men, to make them really better, to cure them of their moral defects and impurities, their sins and vices.

But the Christian institution doth perfectly supply this defect, by taking us off from those carnal and external observances, and principally requiring that we "worship God in spirit and in truth;" by giving us such laws as wholly tend to advance real and substantial goodness, purity and holiness of heart and life, such as mainly tend to reform the minds and manners of men, and to make us like to that holy and perfect Being whom we worship: and besides an external, humble, and reverent demeanour of ourselves in the worship of God, (to which natural religion doth likewise direct,) Christianity hath only instituted two solemn external rites; viz. baptism, and the Lord's supper; whereby we solemnly oblige ourselves to the practice of all virtue and goodness; I say only these two, that, by the multitude of external observances, Christians might not be taken off from the minding of the real and substantial duties of religion.

And therefore the church of Rome have extremely abated and weakened the force of Christianity upon the hearts and lives of men, by amusing them with external rites, which they have multiplied to that excessive degree, as to make the yoke of Christ really heavier than that of Moses, and the Christian religion a more external and carnal commandment than that of the law; and by this means have diverted and taken off the minds of men from the main design of Christianity, insomuch that they are so employed and taken up with matters of external ceremony, that they have no leisure to think of

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being good men, and to mind the great and substantial duties and virtues of the Christian life; so that they have spoiled the Christian religion of one of its chief excellences and perfections, I mean the simplicity of its worship, which they have now encumbered with so many foolish and frivolous rites and observances, as do not only render it more burthensome, but less apt to make men inwardly and substantially good, than even Judaism itself. This is so true and so visible, that the wiser and better sort of them have complained of it for several ages, and still do, as much as they dare for fear of the inquisition, or some other censure.

Secondly, Another defect of the law of Moses was, that it did not give encouragement enough to repentance, by declaring and assuring to us any certain way and method for the expiation and forgiveness of sin. This the rites of all religions aimed at, and pretended to; but were very ineffectual to that end. The heathen sacrifices, and all the cruel and barbarous rites belonging to them, did all pretend to be so many ways of appeasing the offended Deity, and of making atonement and expiation for sin: and the sacrifices of the Jews were instituted by God himself, to make an external and legal expiation, and to be the types and shadows of a better and more perfect sacrifice, which should really expiate sin: but even this was very darkly and imperfectly discovered to them; besides that, the expiations of the law did only extend to the least sort of sins, those of ignorance and inadvertency, but not at all to presumptuous sins, and such as were committed with a high hand, nor to wilful and deliberate sins, except in some very few and rare cases particularly mentioned in the law; so that

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though a great part of the religious rites, both of the pagan and Jewish religion, aimed at the expiation of sin, yet were they really ineffectual to that end; and, upon the whole matter, mankind, though they conceived good hope of God's mercy and forgiveness in case of repentance, ("Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his anger?") yet they were unacquainted with any certain and effectual means to that purpose.

It remains, then, that this great blessing of the forgiveness of sins, was never sufficiently declared and assured to mankind, but through Jesus Christ in the gospel. So St. Paul expressly asserts: (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." The gospel hath provided an expiation for all sins in general, and that by a sacrifice of inestimable value, —the blood of the Son of God. And this is a mighty encouragement to repentance, and one most effectual means to reclaim men from their sins, to be assured that they are indemnified for what is past. And this the apostle means when he says, (Gal. iii. 13.) that "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;" that is, whereas the law left sinners, as to those sins which stood most in need of pardon, under a curse, having provided no expiation for them, Christ hath redeemed them from that curse by making a general expiation for sin; and in this sense it is that the author to the Hebrews says, (chap. ix. 15.) that Christ died for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant; that is,

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for those sins for which the covenant of the law had provided no way of forgiveness; and therefore St. John says emphatically, (1 John i. 7.) that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

Thirdly, The law did not afford sufficiently plain and certain rules and directions for a good life. As the corruption and degeneracy of mankind grew worse, so the light of nature waxed dimmer and dimmer, and the rule of good and evil was more doubtful and uncertain, and that in very considerable instances of our duty. The law of Moses was peculiar to the Jews: and even to them, who only had the benefit and advantage of it, it did not give clear and perfect light and direction as to moral duties, and those things which are of an eternal and immutable reason and goodness. And therefore our Saviour in this sermon explains it to a greater perfection than it was understood to have among the Jews, or the letter of it seemed to intend, and hath not only forbidden several things permitted by that law, as divorce and retaliation of injuries; but hath heightened our duty in several instances of it, requiring us to love our enemies, and to forgive the greatest injuries and provocations, though never so often repeated, and not only not to revenge them, but to requite them with good turns; which were not understood by mankind to be laws before; but yet, when duly considered, are very agreeable to right reason, and the sense of the wisest and best men. So that the Christian religion hath not only fixed and determined our duty, and brought it to a greater certainty, but hath raised it to a greater perfection, and rendered it every way fit to bring the minds of men to a more Divine temper, and a more

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reasonable and perfect way of serving God, than ever the world was instructed in before.

Fourthly, The promises and threatenings of the law were only of temporal good and evil things, which are, in comparison of the endless rewards and punishments of another world, but very languid and faint motives to obedience. Not but that the Jews under the law had such apprehensions of their own immortality, and of a future state of happiness and misery after this life, as natural light suggested to them; which was in most but a wavering and uncertain persuasion, and consequently of small efficacy to engage men to their duty; but the law of Moses added little or nothing to the clearness of those natural notions concerning a future state, and the strengthening of this persuasion in the minds of men; it did rather suppose it, than give any new force and life to it. And for this reason more particularly the apostle tells us, that the law was but weak to make men good; because it did not work strongly enough upon the hopes and fears of men by the weight of its promises, and the terror of its threatenings; and that for this weakness and imperfection of it, it was removed, and a more powerful and awakening dispensation brought in the place of it: (Heb. vii. 18, 19.) "For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment that was before (that is, of the Jewish law) for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof; for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did;" that is, the covenant of the gospel, which promiseth eternal life. And, (chap. viii. 6.) for this reason, more especially, the apostle says, that Christ had "obtained a more excellent ministry, being the Me-

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diator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." And (Rom. i. 16, 18.) St. Paul tells us, that for this reason "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation," because "therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." The clear revelation of a future judgment, was that which made the gospel so proper and so powerful an instrument for the salvation of men. The great impiety of mankind, and their impenitency in it, was not so much to be wondered at before, while the world was, in a great measure, ignorant of the infinite danger of a wicked life; and therefore God is said, in some sort, to overlook it; "but now he commands all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts xvii. 30, 31.) The clear discovery and perfect assurance of a future judgment, calls loudly upon all men to leave their sins and turn to God.

Fifthly, The covenant of the law had no spiritual promises contained in it of the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit for the mortifying of sin, and enabling men to their duty, and supporting them under sufferings; but the gospel is full of clear and express promises to this purpose. Our Saviour hath assured us, that "God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him," (Luke xi. 13.) and this the apostle tells us is actually conferred upon all true Christians, those who do sincerely embrace and believe the gospel: (Rom. viii. 9.) "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Hence

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the gospel is called, by the same apostle, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus:" (ver. 2, of that chap.) "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death;" and in the next words he tells us, that herein manifestly appeared the weakness of the law, that it left men destitute of this mighty help and advantage (at least to any special promise of it): "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, by making him a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit;" that is, that that righteousness which the law aimed at and signified, but was too weak to effect, might be really accomplished in us, "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" that is, who are acted and assisted by a higher and better principle than men either have in nature, or the carnal dispensation of the law did endow men withal. And because of this great defect the law is said to be a state of bondage and servitude; and, on the contrary, the gospel, by reason of this mighty advantage, is called a state of adoption and liberty: (ver. 15.) "For ye have not received the Spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father;" and (2 Cor. iii. 17.) "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." And to this very thing St. Paul appeals, as that whereby men might judge whether the law or the gospel were the more excellent and powerful dispensation: (Gal. iii. 2.) "This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" As if he had said—let this one thing determine that whole mat-

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ter; were ye made partakers of this great privilege and blessing of the Spirit, while ye were of the Jewish religion, or since ye became Christians? And (ver. 14.) he calls it "the blessing of Abraham;" that is, the blessing promised to all nations by Abraham's seed, namely, the Messias; "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

And then, for the supporting us under afflictions, the gospel promiseth an extraordinary assistance of God's Holy Spirit to us: (1 Pet. iv. 14.) "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."

But were there no good men under the dispensation of the law? Yes, certainly there were, and they were so by the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit; but then this was an effect of the Divine goodness, but not of any special promise, contained in that covenant, of Divine grace and assistance to be conferred on all those that were admitted into it. But thus it is in the new covenant of the gospel, and therefore the law is called "a dead letter," "the oldness of the letter," and "the ministration of the letter;" in opposition to the gospel, which is called the "ministration of the Spirit." And this the apostle lays special weight upon, as a main difference between these two covenants, that the first gave an external law, but the new covenant offers inward grace and assistance to enable men to obedience, and hath an inward and powerful efficacy upon the minds of men, accompanying the ministration of it: (Heb. viii. 7—10.) "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place

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have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them he saith, Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, &c. For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts."

And of this inward grace and assistance we are further secured, by the powerful and prevalent and perpetual intercession of our High Priest for sinners at the right hand of God; not like the intercession of the priests under the law, who, being sinners themselves, were less fit to intercede for others; but "we have an High Priest that is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; who, by the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God," to purchase for us those blessings which he intercedes for. The priests under the law were intercessors upon earth; but "Christ is entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." (Heb. ix. 24.) The priests under the law were removed from this office by death; but Christ, because he continues for ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood, and is an everlasting advocate and intercessor for us, in the virtue of his most meritorious sacrifice continually presented to his Father, where he is always at the right hand of God, to present our prayers to him, and to obtain pardon of our sins, and grace to help in time of need, and by his intercession in heaven, to procure all those blessings to be actually conferred upon us, which he purchased for us by his blood upon earth; "wherefore he is able to save to the utmost all those

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that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," as the same apostle speaks, Heb. vii. 25.

And thus I have, as briefly as well I could, shewed how the Christian religion doth supply all the weaknesses and imperfections of the Jewish religion; and, consequently, does in no wise contradict or interfere with the great design of the law and the prophets, but hath perfected and made up whatever was weak or wanting in that institution, to make men truly good; or, as the expression is in the prophet Daniel, " to bring in everlasting righteousness;" that is, to clear and confirm those laws of holiness and righteousness, which are of indispensable and eternal obligation.

And if this be the great design of our Saviour's coming, and the Christian doctrine be every way fitted to advance righteousness and true holiness, and to make us as excellently good as this imperfect state of mortality will admit, since it hath many advantages incomparably beyond any religion or institution that ever was in the world, both in respect of the perfection of its laws, and the force of its motives and arguments to repentance and a holy life, and in respect of the encouragements which it gives, and the examples which it sets before us, and the powerful assistance which it offers to us, to enable us " to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God;" what a shame is this to us, who are under the power of this excellent institution, if the temper of our minds, and the tenor of our conversation, be not in some measure answerable to the gospel of Christ! The greater helps and advantages we have of being good, the greater things may justly be ex-

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pected from us; for "to whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required."

Christianity is the fulfilling of the righteousness of the law, by walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, by mortifying the deeds of the flesh, and by bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, which are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and temperance." The righteousness of faith doth not consist in a barren and effectual life of the gospel, in a mere embracing of the promises of it, and relying upon Christ for salvation; in "a faith without works," which is dead; but in "a faith which worketh by love," in becoming "new creatures," and in "keeping the commandments of God, the righteousness of faith speaking on this wise." "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment;" (1 John iii. 23.) and "this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also," (1 John iv. 21.) "That we approve the things that are excellent, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God," (Phil. i. 10, 11.) "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, mind these things," (chap. iv. 8.)

And then, considering what abundant provision the gospel hath made for our attainment of everlasting salvation, we are altogether without excuse, if we perish. Since God hath raised up so mighty a salvation for us; how shall we escape? If we die

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in our sins, it is not because God would not forgive them, but because we would not repent and be saved; the fault is all our own, and we owe it wholly to ourselves, if we be lost and undone for ever. If when life and death, heaven and hell, are so plainly set before us, eternal misery and perdition fall to our lot and portion, it is not because we were not warned of our danger, or because happiness and the things of our peace were hid from our eyes, but because we have made death and destruction our obstinate and final choice.

" But, beloved, I hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though I thus speak. Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ;" and if we be careful to perform the conditions which the gospel requires on our part, we shall not fail to be made " partakers of that eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised to us, for his mercy's sake in Jesus Christ."

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SERMON CV.

OF THE NATURE OF REGENERATION, AND ITS NECESSITY, IN ORDER TO JUSTIFICATION AND SALVATION.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. —GALAT. vi. 15.

THERE are two Epistles of St. Paul, namely, that to the Romans, and this to the Galatians, which are principally and particularly designed to confute a false persuasion, which had prevailed amongst many Christians, especially those who were converted from Judaism—that it was not enough for men to embrace and confess the Christian religion, unless they kept the law of Moses, or at least submitted to that great precept of circumcision; the neglect whereof, among all the affirmative precepts of the law, was only threatened with excision, or being cut off from among the people. And of the prevalency of this error, and the great disturbance which it made in the Christian church, we have a particular account, Acts xv. where a general council of the apostles is called, and a letter written, in their names, to all the Christian churches, to rectify their apprehensions in this matter (ver. 24. of that chapter): "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye

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must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment," &c.

And upon this occasion likewise it was, that St. Paul wrote this Epistle to the Galatians, as likewise that to the Romans; in the former of which, after he had at large confuted this error, (which he calls the preaching of another gospel, than what the apostles had preached, and the Christians first received;) in the beginning of the fifth chapter he exhorts them to assert the liberty, which Christ had purchased for them, from the obligation of the law of Moses: (ver. 1, 2.) "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing;" not that hereby he condemneth circumcision, as a thing evil in itself; for God never instituted or commanded any thing that was so; but he opposeth the opinion of the necessity of it to our justification and salvation, when the gospel had so plainly taken away the obligation and use of it; and consequently to affirm still the necessity of it, was really to renounce Christianity. For if Judaism was still the way to salvation, Christianity was to no purpose; and if Christianity be now the way, then the obligation to the Jewish religion was ceased. To avoid the force of this reasoning, it was not enough for the false apostles to say (as it seems they did) that Christians were not obliged universally to the whole law of Moses, but principally to the law of circumcision; because circumcision being the sign and badge of that covenant, whoever took that upon him, did thereby own his obligation to the whole law: (ver. 3, 4.) "For I testify again to every man that is cir-

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cised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law: Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace;" that is, whoever of you expect and profess to be justified by the law of Moses, ye take away the necessity and use of the Christian religion; and are fallen from grace; that is, do in effect renounce the gospel; for "we, through the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith," (ver. 5.) we by the Spirit, in opposition to circumcision, which was in the flesh, do expect to be justified by the belief of the gospel. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision;" (ver. 6.) that is, now under the dispensation of the gospel by Christ Jesus, it signifies nothing to a man's justification or salvation, whether he be circumcised, or not circumcised, whether he be a Jew or a gentile. All that the gospel requires as necessary to these purposes, is, that we perform the conditions of the gospel, that so we may be capable of being made partakers of the blessings of it.

Now as the great blessing and benefit of the gospel is variously expressed, as, by the forgiveness of our sins, by our acceptance with God, or (which comprehends both) by our justification, sometimes by adoption, and our being made the sons and children of God, sometimes by redemption, and (which is the consummation of all) by salvation and eternal life: I say, as the blessing and benefit of the gospel is, in Scripture, expressed to us by these several terms, which do in effect all signify the same thing; so our duty, and the condition the gospel requires on our part, is likewise as variously expressed; sometimes, and that very frequently, by the word faith, as being the great source and prin-

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ciple of all religious acts and performances; but then this faith must not be a bare assent and persuasion of the truth of the gospel, but such an effectual belief as expresseth itself in suitable acts of obedience and holiness, such as the apostle here calls πίστις δι ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη, "a faith which worketh by love," a faith that is inspired and acted, or rather consummate and made perfect by charity (for so the word doth often signify), and then this phrase will be just of the same importance with that of St. James: (chap. ii. 22.) "By works is faith made perfect." Sometimes, and that also very frequently, the condition of the gospel is expressed by words which signify the change of our state, as by repentance, conversion, regeneration, renovation, sanctification, the new creature, and the new man, which expressions are all so well known, that I need not refer to particular texts; sometimes the condition of the gospel is expressed by the visible and sensible effects of this inward change in our outward life and actions; as, namely, by obedience and keeping the commandments of God. So (Heb. v. 9.) Christ is said to be "the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;" where obedience is plainly put for the whole condition of the gospel, the performance whereof entitles us to eternal life and happiness.

Now that by these various expressions, one and the same thing is certainly intended and meant, viz. the condition of the gospel; that which is required on our part, in order to our full and perfect justification and acceptance with God, is evident beyond all denial; by comparing the three different ways whereby St. Paul doth express the same proposition for sense and substance; in which he tells us,

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what it is that will avail to our justification under the gospel; that is, according to the terms of the Christian religion; that is, neither here nor there, that it signifies nothing whether a man be circumcised or not, but that we be so qualified as the gospel requires, that the conditions upon which the blessings of the gospel are promised be found in us. And there are three texts wherein the same thing is plainly intended in three very different expressions. (Gal. v. 6.) "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but faith, which is consummate, or made perfect by charity." (Gal. vi. 15.) "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but a new creature." (1 Cor. vii. 19.) "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing: but the keeping of the commandments of God." It is evident, that in these three texts the apostle designs to say the same thing; and consequently, that faith which is made perfect by charity, and the new creature, and keeping of the commandments of God, are the same in sense and substance, viz. the condition of our justification and acceptance with God under the covenant of the gospel, or in the Christian religion.

I shall at present, by God's assistance, handle the second of these texts. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but a new creature." And here the condition of the gospel is expressed to us, by the change of our state, which in Scripture is called our regeneration, or becoming new creatures, and new men. Circumcision was but an outward sign and mark upon the body, and the flesh, though it did indeed prefigure and typify the inward circumcision of the

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heart, the giving of men new hearts, and new spirits, under the more perfect dispensation of the gospel: but now in Jesus Christ, that is in the Christian religion, the presence or the want of this outward mark will avail nothing to our justification: but that which was signified by it, the renovation of our hearts and spirits, our becoming new creatures, is now the condition of our justification and acceptance with God.

The false apostles, indeed, did lay great stress upon the business of circumcision, not so much out of zeal to the law of Moses, as to avoid persecution: (ver. 12.) "They constrain you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ." For, at that time, though the Christians were persecuted, yet the Jews by the Roman edicts had the free exercise of their religion, and therefore they gloried in this external mark of circumcision, because it exempted them from suffering; but St. Paul gloried in his sufferings for Christ, and the marks of that upon his body, (ver. 14.) "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and (ver. 17.) "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." He tells them, what necessities soever they might pretend of circumcision, either for their justification or salvation, the true ground of all was to save themselves from temporal sufferings; and that in the Christian religion it signifieth nothing to recommend them to the favour of God, whether they were circumcised or not; nothing would be available to this purpose, but the renovation and change of their hearts and lives. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature," καινὴ κτίσις, a new creation, to intimate the greatness

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of the change, which Christianity, thoroughly entertained, made in men.

Having thus cleared the occasion and meaning of these words, I come now to consider the particulars contained in them; namely, these two things.

First, That the gospel had taken away the obligation of the law of Moses. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision."

Secondly, That, according to the terms of the Christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision: but a new creature."

I. That the gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law of Moses. In Christ Jesus, that is, now under the dispensation of the gospel, "neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision." There was never any general obligation upon mankind to this rite of circumcision, but only upon the seed of Abraham; but yet upon the preaching of the gospel, many of the Jewish Christians would have brought the gentiles under this yoke; pretending that Christianity was but a superstructure upon the law of Moses, which, together with the gospel, was to be the religion of the whole world; and there was some colour for this, because our Saviour himself submitted to this rite, and was circumcised; which the apostle takes notice of in the 4th chap. of this Epistle, (ver. 4.) "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law;" that is, circumcised. And it is true, indeed, that our blessed Saviour was circumcised; but not to signify to us the perpetuity of circumcision, and the continuance of it under the

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Christian religion, but for a quite different end; as a testimony of his obedience to that law, which, though afterwards it was to expire, yet was to be obeyed whilst it was in force, by all that were born under it; he was "made under the law," and it became him, who came to teach mankind obedience to the laws of God, "to fulfil all righteousness" himself: and therefore the apostle, in this Epistle, where he takes notice of this, that Christ was "made under the law," gives this reason of it, that he might be the fitter to free those who were under it from the servitude of it; he was "made under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law;" and that those who were in the condition of servants before, might be set at liberty, and "receive the adoption of sons."

But how did his being "made under the law," qualify him "to redeem those who were under the law?" Thus—by submitting to it himself, he shewed that he owned the authority of it, and that he had no malice nor enmity against it; or, as he himself expresses it, that he "came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it." And being fulfilled, and having served the time and end for which God intended it, it expired of itself; like a law which is not made for perpetuity, but limited to a certain period. And our blessed Saviour, who came with greater authority than Moses, and gave greater testimony of his Divine authority, had sufficient power to declare the expiration of it; and by commissioning his disciples, before and after his death, to preach the gospel to the whole world, he put an end to that particular law and dispensation, which only concerned the Jewish nation, by giving a general law to all mankind.

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So that from the death of our Saviour, and his ascension into heaven, upon which followed the general publication of the gospel, the law of Moses ceased; and, according to our Saviour's express appointment, proselytes were to be admitted into the Christian church only by baptism, and not by circumcision. And if circumcision, which was the sign of that covenant, was laid aside, then the whole obligation of that law and covenant which God had made with the Jews was also ceased. It was once, indeed, the mark of God's chosen and peculiar people; but now that God hath revealed himself to the whole world by his Son, and offers salvation to all mankind, gentiles as well as Jews, "the wall of separation is broken down," and circumcision, which was the mark of distinction between Jews and gentiles, is taken away; and therefore, he is said to have "made peace by his cross," and to have "blotted out and taken away the hand-writing of ordinances, nailing it to his cross;" that is, from the time of his death, to have taken away the obligation of the law of Moses, though it was a good while after, before the Jews were wholly weaned from the veneration and use of it.

Nay, it was some time before the apostles were clearly convinced that the gospel was to be preached to the gentiles; this being one of those truths, which our Saviour promised after his departure, his Spirit should lead them into the perfect knowledge of; and then they were fully instructed, that the law of Moses was expired, and that it was no longer necessary to the salvation of men, that they should be circumcised and keep that law. And though it was once enjoined by God himself to the Jews, and their obedience to it was necessary to their accept-

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ance with God; yet now, by Christ Jesus, God hath offered salvation to men upon other terms; and whether they were circumcised or not, was of no moment to their justification or salvation one way or other; but provided they performed the condition of this new covenant of the gospel, they were all alike capable of the Divine favour and acceptance.

But I proceed to that which I mainly intend to prosecute from these words; and that is the

II. Second particular in the text; namely, that according to the terms of the gospel, and the Christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision: but a new creature." For the full explication of this, I shall do these three things.

First, Shew what is implied in this phrase of "a new creature."

Secondly, That this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, and that it is the same in substance with "faith perfected by charity," and with "keeping the commandments of God."

Thirdly, That it is very reasonable it should be so.

1. What is implied in this phrase of "a new creature." It is plain, at first sight, that it is a metaphorical expression of that great and thorough change which is made in men by the gospel, or the Christian religion. The Scripture sets forth to us this change by a great variety of expressions; by conversion, and turning from our iniquities unto God; by repentance (which signifies a change of our mind and resolution, and is in Scripture called repentance from dead works, and repentance unto

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life); by regeneration, or being born again; by resurrection from the dead, and rising to newness of life; by sanctification, and being washed and cleansed from all filthiness and impurity; which three last metaphors are implied in baptism, which is called regeneration. (Tit. iii. 5.) "According to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" and our being "born again of water and the Holy Ghost;" (John iii. 3.) "Except a man be born again," &c. and (ver. 5.) "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" and "the purifying of our consciences;" (Heb. x. 22.) "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water;" and "the answer of a good conscience towards God;" (1 Pet. iii. 21.) "Baptism doth now save us; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God;" and finally, our being "baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ;" (Rom. vi. 3, 4.) "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." And lastly, this change is set forth to us by renovation, and our being made new creatures and new men; (2 Cor. v. 17.) "Therefore, if any man be in Christ," that is, professeth himself a Christian, "he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." And so likewise, (Ephes. iv. 22, 23, 24.) this great change is expressed by "putting off, concerning the former conversation, the old man,

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which is corrupt according to the lusts of deceit; and being renewed in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The expression is very emphatical, "renewed in the spirit of our minds;" that is, in our very minds and spirits, to signify to us that it is a most inward and thorough change, reaching to the very centre of our souls and spirits. And Coloss. iii. 9, 10, 11. it is represented much after the same manner; "Seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all." Which is the same with what the apostle says here in the text, that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature;" that is, these external marks and differences signify nothing: but this inward change, "the new creature—Christ formed in us;" this in the Christian religion is all in all.

But that we may the more clearly understand the just importance of this metaphor of "a new creature," or a new creation, I shall,

First, Consider what it doth certainly signify, by comparing this metaphorical phrase with other plain texts of Scripture.

And, secondly, That it doth not import what some would extend it to, so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this, and the like metaphors in Scripture, without any manner of countenance from plain texts.

First, I shall consider what this metaphor doth

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certainly import, so as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of Scripture; namely, these two things:

1. The greatness of this change.

2. That it is effected and wrought by a Divine power:

1. The greatness of this change; it is called καινὴ κτίσις, a new creation; as if the Christian doctrine, firmly entertained and believed, did, as it were, mould and fashion men over again, transforming them into a quite other sort of persons, than what they were before, and made such a change in them, as the creating power of God did, in bringing this beautiful and orderly frame of things out of their dark and rude chaos. Thus the apostle represents it: (2 Cor. iv. 6.) "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness (alluding to the first creation), hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We are translated from one extreme to another; (Acts xxvi. 18.) when our Lord sends Paul to preach the gospel to the gentiles, he tells him what a change it would make in them, by "opening their eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." And St. Peter expresses the change which Christianity makes in men, by their being "called out of darkness into a marvellous light;" (1 Pet. ii. 9.) And so St. Paul, (Eph. v. 8.) "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord."

And, indeed, wherever the doctrine of Christ hath its full effect, and perfect work, it makes a mighty change both in their inward principles and outward practice; it darts a new light into their

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minds, so that they see things otherwise than they did before, and forms a different judgment of things from what they did before; it endues them with a new principle, and new resolutions, gives them another spirit, and another temper, a quite different sense and gust of things from what they formerly had. And this inward change of their minds necessarily produceth a proportionable change in their lives and conversations, so that the man steers quite another course, acts after another rate, and drives on quite other designs from what he did before.

And this is remarkably seen in those who are reclaimed from impiety and profaneness to religion, and from a vicious to a virtuous course of life. The change is great and real in all; but not so sensible and visible in some, as others; in those who are made good by the insensible steps of a pious and virtuous education; as in those who are translated out of a quite contrary state, and "turned from the power of Satan unto God," and "translated out of the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of Christ;" which was the case of the heathen world, in their first conversion to Christianity.

2. This change is effected and wrought by a Divine power, of the same kind with that which created the world, and raised up Christ Jesus from the dead; two great and glorious instances of the Divine power; and to these the Scripture frequently alludes, when it speaks of this new creation. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts. Like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also are raised to newness of life," saith St. Paul. (Rom. vi. 4.) And to the same purpose the same apostle speaks, (Ephes. i. 19, 20.) "And that ye

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may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the operation of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." So that our renovation, and being made new creatures, is an instance of the same glorious power, which exerted itself in the first creation of things, and in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead; but not altogether after the same manner, as I shall shew under the next head.

I should now, in the second place, proceed to shew, that this metaphor of a new creation doth not import what some men would extend it to, so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this and other like metaphors of Scripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts. But this I reserve to another discourse.

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SERMON CVI.

OF THE NATURE OF REGENERATION, AND ITS NECESSITY, IN ORDER TO JUSTIFICATION AND SALVATION.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.—GALAT. vi. 15.

IN these words are contained these two things:—

First, That the gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law, having taken away the sign of that covenant, which was circumcision.

Secondly, That, according to the terms of the gospel, and the Christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives. For the full explication of this, I propounded to do these three things:

I. To shew what is implied in this phrase of "a new creature."

II. That this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, and that it is the same in sense and substance with those other expressions, in the two parallel texts, of "faith perfected by charity," and "keeping the commandments of God."

III. That it is very reasonable that this should be the condition of our justification, and acceptance to the favour of God.

I began with the first of these; viz. To shew what is implied in this phrase of "a new creature;" as to which I shewed,

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First, What this metaphor doth certainly import, so as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of Scripture; namely, the greatness of this change, and that it is effected by a Divine power. I now proceed,

Secondly, To shew, that it doth not import what some would extend it to, and that so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the mere and single strength of this and other like metaphors of Scripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts: such doctrines as these three.

1. That as the creation was by an irresistible act of the Divine power, so is this new creation, or conversion of a sinner.

2. That as creatures were merely passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we to our conversion and regeneration.

3. That as the creation of the several ranks and kinds of creatures was in an instant, and effected by the powerful word of God, only saying, let such and such things be, and immediately they were; so this new creation, or the work of regeneration, is in an instant, and admits of no degrees.

Concerning these three doctrines, of great moment and consequence in divinity, I shall shew, with all the clearness and brevity I can, that they are built solely upon metaphors of Scripture, tortured and strained too far, without any real ground or foundation from Scripture or reason; nay, contrary to the tenor of the one and the dictates of the other; nay, indeed, contrary to the general experience of the operation of God's grace upon the minds of men in their conversion.

First, It is pretended, that as the creation was

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by an irresistible act of the Divine power, so is the new creation, or the conversion of a sinner; and this is solely argued from the metaphorical expressions of Scripture concerning conversion; such as being "called out of darkness into light," alluding to that powerful word of God, which in the first creation "commanded the light to shine out of darkness; being quickened, and raised to a new life;" and from this metaphor here in the text of a new creation.

But surely it is a dangerous thing in divinity, to build doctrines upon metaphors, especially if we strain them to all the similitudes which a quick and lively imagination can find out; whereas some one obvious thing is commonly intended in the metaphor, and the meaning is absolved and acquitted in that, and it is folly to pursue it into all those similitudes which a good fancy may suggest. When our Saviour says, that "he will come as a thief in the night," it is plain what he means; that the day of judgment will surprise the careless world, when they least look for it, that "he will come at an hour when they are not aware;" and though he resemble his coming to that of "a thief in the night," yet here is nothing of robbery in the case. So here, when the change which Christianity makes in men is called a new creation, this only imports the greatness of the change, which by the power of God's grace is made upon the hearts and lives of men; and the metaphor is sufficiently absolved in this plain sense and meaning of it, agreeable to the literal expressions of Scripture concerning this thing; and there is no need that this change should in all other respects answer the work of creation; and consequently, there is no necessity that it should be

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effected in an irresistible manner, or that we should be altogether passive in this change, and that we should no ways concur to it by any act of our own, or that this work should be done in an instant, and admit of no steps and degrees.

It is not necessary that this change should be effected in an irresistible manner. God may do so, when he pleaseth, without any injury to his creatures; for it is certainly no wrong to any man to be made good and happy against his will; and I do not deny, but that God sometimes does so. The call of the disciples to follow Christ, seems to have been a very sudden and forcible impression upon their minds, without any appearing reason for it; for it is not reasonable for any man to leave his calling, and follow every one that bids him do so. The conversion of Saul, from a persecutor of Christianity to a zealous preacher of it, was certainly effected, if not in an irresistible, yet in a very forcible and violent manner. The conversion of three thousand at one sermon, when the Holy Ghost descended in a visible manner upon the apostles, was certainly the effect of a mighty and overpowering degree of God's grace. And the like may be said of the sudden conversion of so many persons from heathenism, and great wickedness and impiety of life, to the sincere profession of Christianity, by the preaching of the apostles afterwards.

But that this is not of absolute necessity, nor the ordinary method of God's grace, to work upon the minds of men in so overpowering, much less in an irresistible manner, is as plain as any thing of that nature can be, both from experience, and the reason of the thing, and the constant tenor of the Scripture. We find that many (perhaps the greatest part) of

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those that are good are made so by the insensible steps and degrees of a religious education, and having been never vicious, can give no great account of any sensible change, only that, when they came to years of understanding, they considered things more; and the principles that were instilled into them in their younger years did put forth themselves more vigorously at that time, as seeds sprout out of the ground after they have a good while been buried and laid hid in the earth.

And it is contrary to reason, to make an irresistible act of Divine power necessary to our repentance and conversion; because this necessarily involves in it two things which seem very unreasonable.

First, That no man repents upon consideration and choice, but upon mere force and violent necessity, which quite takes away the virtue of repentance, whatever virtue there may be in the consequent acts of a regenerate state.

Secondly, It implies that the conversion and repentance of those upon whom God doth not work irresistibly is impossible, which is the utmost can be said to excuse the impenitency of men, by taking it off from their own choice, and laying it upon the impossibility of the thing, and an utter disability in them to choose and do otherwise.

And it is, likewise, contrary to the constant tenor of the Bible, which supposeth that men do very frequently resist the grace and Holy Spirit of God. It is said of the pharisees, by our Saviour, (Luke vii. 30.) that "they rejected the counsel of God against themselves;" that is, the merciful design of God for their salvation. And of the Jews, (Acts vii. 51.) that "they always resisted the Holy Ghost." So that some operations of God's grace and Holy Spirit

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are resistible, and such as, if men did not resist them, would be effectual to bring them to faith and repentance, else why are the pharisees said to reject "the counsel of God against themselves," that is, to their own ruin? implying, that if they had not rejected it, they might have been saved; and if they had, it had been without irresistible grace; for that which was offered to them, was actually resisted by them. Other texts plainly shew, that the reason of men's impenitency and unbelief is not any thing wanting on God's part, but on theirs; as those known texts, wherein our Saviour laments the case of Jerusalem, because they obstinately brought destruction upon themselves: (Luke xix. 42.) "If thou hadst known in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace:" intimating, that they might have known them, so as to have prevented that desolation which was coming upon them, and was a forerunner of their eternal ruin: "but now they are hid from thine eyes;" intimating, that then God gave them up to their own blindness and obstinacy; but the time was, when they might have "known the things of their peace;" which cannot be upon the supposition of the necessity of an irresistible act of God's grace to their conversion and repentance; because then without that they could not have repented, and if that had been afforded to them, they had infallibly repented. So likewise, in that other text, (Matt. xxiii. 37.) "Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and you would not." And, in John, v. 40. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." He "would have gathered them," and they "would not;" he would have given them life, but they would not come to

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him. Are these serious and compassionate expostulations and declarations of our Saviour's gracious intention towards them, any ways consistent with an impossibility of their repentance? which yet must be said, if irresistible grace be necessary thereto; for then repentance is impossible without it, and that it was not afforded to them is plain, because they did not repent. The same may be said of that solemn declaration of God, (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Can it be said that God hath no pleasure in the death of sinners, and yet be true, that he denies, to the greatest part of them, that grace which is necessary to their repentance? Upon this supposition, how can it be true, that, "if the mighty works that were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented," (Matt. xi. 21.) since irresistible grace did not accompany those miracles? for if it had, Chorazin and Bethsaida had repented, and without it Tyre and Sidon could not repent.

The same difficulty is in those texts, wherein God is represented as expecting the repentance and conversion of sinners; and our Saviour wondering at their unbelief and hardness of heart, and upbraiding them with it, (Isa. v. 4.) "What could I have done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Mark vi. 6, it is said, our Saviour marvelled at the unbelief of the Jews; and, (chap. xvi. 14.) that he "upbraided his disciples with their unbelief and hardness of heart." But why should the repentance of sinners be expected, or their unbelief marvelled at, or in-

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deed be upbraided to them, by him who knew it impossible to them, without an irresistible power and grace, which he knew likewise was not afforded to them? neither God nor man have reason to wonder that any man does not do that, which, at the same time, they certainly know he cannot do.

The bottom of all that is said to avoid this pressing difficulty is this,—that this impotence and disability of sinners is their sin, and therefore cannot be pleaded in their excuse, for their impenitency; but God may still justly require that of them which they had once a natural power to do, but wilfully forfeited and lost it; they had this power in Adam, and forfeited it by his disobedience.—To shew how slight this evasion is, I need not run into that argument, how far we are guilty of the sin of our first parents. That by that first transgression and disobedience all mankind suffers, and our natures are extremely corrupted and depraved, cannot be denied; but the corruption of our natures is a thing very different from personal guilt, strictly and properly so called. I will take the business much shorter; and granting that mankind had in Adam a natural power to have continued obedient to the laws of God, yet, since "by one man sin entered into the world," and "all are now sinners," here is an obligation to repentance as well as to obedience, and men shall be condemned for their impenitency. I ask now, whether in Adam we had a power to repent? It is certain Adam had not this power, and therefore I cannot see how we could lose it, and forfeit it in him. Adam, indeed, had a natural power not to have sinned, and so not to have needed repentance; but no power to repent in the state of innocency; because, in that state, repentance was

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impossible, because there could be no occasion for it. He had it not after his fall, because by that he forfeited all his power to that which is spiritually good. It is said, indeed, he had it in innocency, but forfeited it by his fall; so that he had it when there was no occasion or possibility for the exercise of it, and lost it when there was occasion for it: or if he did not lose it by his fall, we have it still, and then there is no need of any supernatural, much less irresistible, grace to repentance; so that our impotency, as to the particular duty of repentance, cannot be charged upon us as our fault, not so much as upon the account of original sin.

But the want of this power is the consequent and just punishment of our first transgression. Be it so; but if this impotency still remain in all those to whom God doth not afford his irresistible grace, how comes the grace offered in the gospel to aggravate the impenitency of men, and increase their condemnation? for if it be no remedy against this impotency, how comes it to inflame the guilt of impenitency? or how is it grace to offer mercy to those upon their repentance, who are out of a possibility of repenting; and yet, to punish them more severely for their impenitency after this offer made to them, which they cannot accept without that grace which God is resolved not to afford them? If this be the case, the greatest favour had been to have had no such offer made to them; and it had been happier for mankind, that the grace of God had not appeared to all men, but only to those who shall irresistibly be made partakers of the benefit of it.

Secondly, Another doctrine grounded upon this metaphor of a new creation, is, that we are merely passive in the work of conversion and regeneration,

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and contribute nothing to it; that God does all, and we do nothing at all; and this follows from the former, especially if we allow the metaphor as far as it will carry us. For as the first creation of things was by an irresistible act of the Divine power, so the things that were made were only passive in their creation; and, as they could make no resistance, so neither could they contribute any thing to their being what they are. And this doctrine is not only argued from the metaphor of a new creation, but from several other metaphors used in Scripture, to describe our natural state; as, namely, darkness, blindness, and our being dead in trespasses and sins; from whence it is inferred, that we contribute no more to our renovation, than darkness doth to the introduction of light, than a blind man can do to the recovery of his sight, or a dead man to his own resurrection; but are wholly passive in this work. And to countenance this notion, they make great advantage of the character which is given in Scripture of the most degenerate heathen, taking it for granted, that their condition is the true standard of a natural and unregenerate state; and to this purpose they insist particularly upon that description of the gentile idolaters, (Eph. iv. 18, 19.) "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts; who being past feeling, had given themselves over to lasciviousness; to work all uncleanness with greediness." Which is, indeed, a description of men in their natural state, but not of all; but of such as by the worst sort of vicious practices of the grossest idolatry, and most abominable lewdness, were degenerated to the utmost, so that their condition

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seemed desperate, without a miraculous and extraordinary grace of God, which was probably afforded to many of these. In like manner they argue the common condition of mankind, from the description which is given of the wickedness of men, before God brought the flood upon them: (Gen. vi. 5.) "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This they make the character of all men, in their natural state, whereas this is a description of an extraordinary degeneracy of men, signifying that the world was then extremely bad, and depraved to the highest degree; for God gives this as a reason why he was resolved to drown the world, and "to destroy man from the face of the earth," because "their wickedness was grown to so great a height." But if this were a description of the natural state of mankind, this could be no particular reason for bringing a flood upon the world at that time, there being the same reason for it, for fifteen hundred years before, and ever will be the same reason to the end of the world; that is, that men are naturally corrupted and depraved. Surely they consider the Scripture very superficially, that interpret it at this rate!

It is true, that the nature of man is sadly corrupted and depraved; but not so bad as, by vicious practices and habits, it may be made; all men are not equally at the same distance from the grace of God; some are nearer to the kingdom of God than others, and less force and violence will serve to rescue them from the power of Satan, and to transplant them into the kingdom of Christ. The prevalency and dominion of sin makes an unregenerate state, as

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the prevalency of grace puts a man into a regenerate state. An unregenerate man is not necessarily as bad as is possible, no more than it is necessary to a regenerate state, that a man be perfectly good; so that it is a great mistake to argue the common condition of all mankind, from the descriptions that are given in the Scripture of the worst of men; and therefore, if it were granted that irresistible grace were necessary for the conversion of such, it will not follow that the same is necessary to all.

All unregenerate men are not equally devoid of a sense of God, and spiritual things; they have many convictions of what they ought to be and do, and under those convictions are very capable of persuasion, which dead men are not. The grace of God is necessary to the conversion of a sinner; but it is not necessary that he should be only passive in this work. Experience tells us the contrary, that we can do something, that we can cooperate with the grace of God; and the Scripture tells us the same, and makes it an argument and encouragement to us "to work out our own salvation, because God works in us both to will and to do of his own goodness;" (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) Besides that, it is the greatest and justest discouragement in the world, to all endeavours of repentance and reformation, to tell men that they can do nothing in it. He that is sure of this, that he can do nothing in this work, is a fool if he make any attempt to become better, because he struggles with an impossibility; and if the work will be done at all, it will be done without him, and he neither can nor ought to have any hand in it. But will any metaphor bear men out against so palpable an absurdity as this?

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And yet, after all, there is no force in these metaphors, to prove what they aim at by them. For if to be dead in sin signifies an utter impotency to goodness, then to be dead to sin must, on the contrary, signify an impossibility of sinning; for just as the unregenerate man is dead in sin, so he that is regenerate is said in Scripture to be dead to sin: but yet the best of regenerate men, notwithstanding they are dead to sin, and alive to God, do offend in many things, and too frequently fall into sin. Why then should the metaphor be so strong on the one side, that a man, who is said to be dead in sin, should not be able so much as to co-operate with the grace of God in the work of repentance and conversion?

In short, if this be true, that men in an unregenerate and unconverted state are perfectly dead, and have no more sense of spiritual things than a dead man hath of natural objects, then all precepts and exhortations to repentance, and all promises and threatenings to argue and persuade men thereto are vain, and to no purpose; and it would be every whit as proper and reasonable for us to preach in the churchyard, over the graves of dead men, as in the church to the unregenerate; because they can no more act and move towards their own recovery, out of a state of sin and death, than the dead bodies can rise out of their graves.

But it is said, that the end of exhortations and promises is not to declare to men their power, but their duty. But if they be insensible, it is to as little purpose to declare to them their duty, as their power. Besides, it will be a hard thing to convince men that any thing is their duty, which at the same time we declare to them to be out of their power.

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But this is Pelagianism, to say that of ourselves we can repent and turn to God. And who says we can of ourselves do this, besides the Pelagians? we affirm the necessity of God's grace hereto, and withal the necessity of our co-operating with the grace of God. We say that without the powerful excitation and aid of God's grace, no man can repent and turn to God; but we say likewise, that God cannot be properly said to aid and assist those who do nothing themselves.

But men can do more than they do, and therefore are justly condemned: not in the work of conversion sure; if they can do nothing at all. But they can do more by way of preparation towards it. Suppose they do all they can towards it, will this save them, or will God upon this irresistibly work their conversion? No, they say, notwithstanding any preparatory work that we can do, conversion may not follow; how then does this mend the matter?

But still they say the fault is in men's want of will, and not of power; "you will not come unto me, that ye might have life." But can they will to come? no, that they cannot neither. Why then it is still want of power that hinders them. The offer of life is a very gracious offer to them that are guilty, and liable to death, as we all are; but not if the condition be utterly impossible to us, though the impossibility springs from our own fault, as I will plainly shew by a fair instance. A prince offers a pardon to a traitor fast locked in chains, if he will come to him and submit himself; but if he be still detained in chains, and the prince do not some way or other help him to his liberty, it is so far from being a favour to offer him a pardon upon

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these terms, that it is a cruel derision of his misery, to say to him, You will not come to me that you may be pardoned; and this notwithstanding that his being cast into chains was the effect of his own crime and fault; the application is obvious. I should now proceed to answer an objection or two, and then to give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to Scripture, and the attributes and perfections of God; but this I shall reserve for another discourse.

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SERMON CVII.

OF THE NATURE OF REGENERATION, AND ITS NECESSITY, IN ORDER TO JUSTIFICATION AND SALVATION.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. —GALAT. vi. 15.

THE point which I am upon from these words is, that, according to the terms of the gospel, nothing will avail to our justification, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives.

For the full explication of this, I propounded to shew,

First, What is implied in this expression of the "new creature."

Secondly, That this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God.

Thirdly, That it is highly reasonable that this should be the condition of our justification.

In speaking to the first of these, I have shewed, first, what this metaphor doth certainly import; and secondly, that it doth not import what some would extend it to, whereon to found such doctrines as these:

First, That as the creation was an irresistible act of the Divine power, so is this new creation, or the conversion of a sinner.

Secondly, As creatures were merely passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we in our conversion and regeneration.

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Thirdly, That as the creation of the several kinds and ranks of creatures was effected in an instant, by the powerful word of God, saying, Let such and such things be, and immediately they were; so this new creation is in an instant, and admits of no degrees.

The first of these I have considered, and entered upon the second; namely, that as the creatures were merely passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we in our conversion and regeneration.

This I told you does plainly make void all the precepts and exhortations, and all the promises and threatenings of Scripture, to argue and persuade men to repentance.

That which remains to be done upon this argument, is,

First, To answer an objection or two, which are commonly urged by the assertors of this doctrine, that we are merely passive in the work of conversion.

Secondly, To give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to Scripture, and the attributes and perfections of God. For the

First, The objections are these three:

1. That if we be not merely passive in the work of regeneration and conversion, we ascribe the whole glory of this work to ourselves, and not to God.

Or, secondly, We do, however, extenuate or lessen the grace of God, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours of our own towards this change.

Thirdly, They ask St. Paul's question, "Who maketh thee to differ?" and think it impossible to be answered, if the efficacy of God's grace do de-

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pend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. These are all the material objections I know; to every one of which I hope to give a very clear and sufficient answer.

1st Objection. If we be not merely passive in the work of regeneration and conversion, we ascribe the whole glory of this work to ourselves, and not to God. But that I certainly know this objection is commonly made, and have seen it in very considerable authors, I could not believe that men of so good sense could make it. For this is to say, that if we do any thing in this work, though we acknowledge that what we do in it, we do by the assistance of God's grace, we ascribe it wholly to ourselves, and rob God altogether of the glory of his grace; or, in plainer terms, it is to say, that though we say God does never so much, and we but very little in this work, yet if we do not say that God does all, and we nothing at all, we take the whole work to ourselves, and say God does nothing at all; which let any one that considers what we say, judge whether we say so or no.

The Scripture, which never robs God of the glory of his grace, does I am sure ascribe our conversion and repentance, our regeneration and sanctification to several causes; to the Holy Spirit of God, to his ministers, to his word, and to ourselves. To the Holy Spirit of God, as the principal author, and efficient. Hence we are said "to be born of the Spirit, to be sanctified by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. To the ministers of God, as the instruments of our conversion. Hence they are said "to turn men to righteousness, to convert a sinner from the evil of his ways, to save souls from death, to save themselves, and them that hear them; to be

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our spiritual fathers, and to beget us in Christ." To the word of God, as the subordinate means and instruments of our conversion. Hence we are said "to be begotten by the word of truth, to be sanctified by the truth." And lastly, to ourselves, as concurring some way or other to this work. Hence we are said "to believe and repent, to turn from our evil ways, and to turn to the Lord, to cleanse and purify ourselves." Hence, likewise, are those frequent commands in Scripture, "to amend our ways and doings, to wash our hearts from wickedness, to repent and turn ourselves, and to make ourselves new hearts and new spirits." So that all these causes, the Spirit of God, his ministers, his word, and we ourselves, do all some way or other concur and contribute to this effect. God indeed is the principal, and hath so great a hand in this work from beginning to end, that all the rest are nothing in comparison, and we do well to ascribe to him the whole glory of it, "that no flesh may glory in his sight:" but nevertheless, in strictness of speech, sufficiently warranted by Scripture, the ministers of God, and the word of God, and we ourselves, do all co-operate some way or other to our conversion and regeneration; and by ascribing to any of these such parts as they truly have in this work, God is not robbed of any part of the glory of his grace, much less of the whole. Much less is it the ascribing it all to ourselves, whom we affirm to have the least part in it, nor worthy to be mentioned in comparison of the riches of God's grace towards us. And yet, unless we do something, what can be the meaning of "making ourselves new hearts and new spirits?" Is it only that we should be passive to the irresistible operations of God's grace? that

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is, that we should not hinder, what we can neither hinder nor promote; that we should so demean ourselves, as of necessity we must whether we will or no. So then "to make ourselves new hearts and new spirits," is to do nothing at all towards the hinderance or furtherance of this work: and if this be the meaning of it, it is a precept and exhortation just as fit for stones, as for men; that is, very improper for either.

2d Objection. But however, we do extenuate and lessen the grace of God, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours on our part towards this change. For answer to this, three things deserve to be considered:

First, It is very well worthy our consideration, that they who make this objection, have the confidence to pretend that they do not diminish the grace of God, by confining it to a very small part of mankind in comparison; nay, they will needs face us down, that by this very thing they do very much exalt and magnify it, and that the grace of God is so much the greater, by how much the fewer they are that are partakers of it. But I hope they only mean that the grace is greater to themselves (in which conceit there is commonly as much of envy as gratitude); but surely they cannot mean that the grace which is limited to a few, is greater in itself, and upon the whole matter, than that which is extended to a great many; it being a downright contradiction, to say that the grace of God is magnified by being confined. For at this rate of reasoning, the lesser it is, the greater it must be, and by undeniable consequence would be greatest of all, if it were none at all. So that it seems the grace of God may be extenuated in favour

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of ourselves, but when we do so we must say we magnify it.

Secondly, But to come close to the objection; though it be true, that if God's grace in our conversion do not do all, it does not do so much as if it did all; yet this is really no injury or dishonour to the grace of God; and though in some sense it doth extenuate it, it doth not in truth and reality take off from the glory of it. In my opinion, the grace and favour of a prince is not the less in offering a pardon to a traitor, who puts forth his hand and gladly receives it, than if he forced it upon him whether he would or no. I am sure, it is in the first case much fitter to give it, and he on whom it is conferred much better qualified to receive it. It is no disparagement to a prince's favour, that it is bestowed on one who is in some measure qualified to receive it. But be it more or less in one case than the other, this is certain, that in both cases the man owes his life to the great grace and goodness of his prince; and I cannot see how it lessens the grace, that the miserable object of it, the guilty and condemned person, was, either by his humble submission, or thankful acceptance of it, in some degree better qualified to receive such a favour, than an obstinate refuser of it.

Thirdly, Which is the principal consideration of all, we must take great heed, that while we endeavour to make God to do all in the conversion of sinners, we do not by this means charge upon him the ruin and destruction of impenitent sinners, which I doubt we should do, if we make the reason of their impenitency and ruin their utter impotency and disability to repent; and we certainly make this the reason of their impenitency and ruin, if

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there be no other difference but this between penitent and impenitent sinners; namely, that in the one God works repentance by an irresistible act of his power, so that he cannot but repent, and denies this grace to the other, without which he cannot possibly repent. But the Scripture chargeth the destruction of men upon themselves, and lays their impenitency at their own door. "O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help;" (Hosea xiii. 9.) But where is the help, when the grace absolutely necessary to repentance is denied? And how is their destruction of themselves, if it is unavoidable, let them do what they can? (Isa. v. 3, 4.) God appeals to his people Israel that nothing was wanting on his part, that was fit and necessary to be done, that they might bring forth the fruits of repentance, and better obedience: "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge I pray you between me and my vineyard: what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Is it true that God hath done all that was necessary, to have brought them to repentance? Then if irresistible grace be necessary, he afforded them that; but that was not afforded them, because then they must unavoidably have repented, and there had been no cause for this complaint; if he did not afford it, but only the outward means of repentance without the inward grace (as some say), then it is easy to judge why they did not repent; because they could not; and there seems to be no cause either of wonder, or complaint. Besides that, it will be hard to justify that saying, "What could I have done more to my

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vineyard, that I have not done in it?" when it is acknowledged by the assertors of this doctrine, that the main thing was not done, and that without which all the rest signified nothing, leaving them under the same impossibility of repentance, as if nothing at all had been done to them.

But now, upon our supposition, that sufficient grace was afforded to them, which they wilfully neglected to make use of, the reason and equity of this complaint is evident, and God is acquitted, as having done what was needful on his part, and the sinner justly condemned, for not concurring with the grace of God as he might have done; which shews that we are not merely passive in this work; but something is expected from us, after God hath done his part, which if we neglect to do, our destruction is of ourselves. Whereas the contrary supposition, upon pretence of glorifying God's grace, by making him to do all in the conversion of sinners, endangers the honour of his justice, by laying the impenitency of sinners, and their ruin consequent upon it, at his door; which is to advance one attribute of God upon the ruin of another; whereas it is a fundamental principle of religion, to take care to reconcile the attributes and perfections of God to one another; for that is not a Divine perfection, which contradicts any other perfection.

The third objection is grounded upon that question of St. Paul, (1 Cor. iv. 7.) "Who maketh thee to differ?" which they think impossible to be answered, if the efficacy of God's grace depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. For, say they, when God offers his grace to two persons for their repentance, if the true reason why the one repents, and the other remains impenitent, be this,

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that the one complieth with this grace of God, and yieldeth to it, the other resists and stands out against it; then it is not the grace of God which makes the difference, for that is equal to both, but something in themselves, and so it is not God that makes them to differ, but they themselves.

But this question is impertinent to this case. The apostle speaks it concerning spiritual gifts, upon account of which they factiously admired some of the apostles above others, and concerning them the question is very proper, "who maketh thee to differ?" Miraculous gifts were so ordered by God, that men were merely passive in the receiving of them, and contributed nothing to the obtaining of them; and therefore, if one had greater gifts than another, it was merely the pleasure of God that made the difference. But the case is not the same in the graces of God's Spirit, towards the obtaining and improving whereof we ourselves may contribute something; our Saviour having assured us, that "to him that hath shall be given." And here the question is not proper, nor is it true, that the grace of God makes all the difference. It is indeed the foundation of all the good that is in us: but our different improvement makes different attainments in grace and goodness. Among those to whom the talents were entrusted, what made the difference between the man who wrapped his talent in the napkin, and buried it, and those who gained double by theirs, but that the one improved the grace conferred on him, the other neglected it, and this without any manner of reflection upon, or diminution of the grace of God, or any danger from St. Paul's question, "who maketh thee to differ?" Put the case: a pardon is offered to two malefactors, the

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one accepts, the other refuses it; their own choice makes the difference between them; but he that is saved is nevertheless beholden to the king's pardon for his life; and it were a senseless ingratitude in him, because he accepts the pardon, when the other refuseth it, to say, that he did not owe his life to the grace and favour of his prince, but might thank himself for it; whereas that he was in a capacity to accept a pardon, was wholly due to the clemency of his prince, who offered it to him when he no wise deserved it. In this case the thing plainly appears as it is; by which every man may see, that it is against common sense to pretend that the grace of God is destroyed, if there be any compliance on our part with it: that it is no grace, if it be not forced upon us, and we be not merely passive in the reception of it. I proceed, in the

Second place, To give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, and the essential attributes and perfections of God. In order to which, I will give you a short view of the several opinions concerning this matter. And there are two extreme, and two middle opinions, concerning the operation of God's grace in the conversion of a sinner.

The first of the extreme opinions is, that which all this while I have been arguing against; namely, that all that are converted and regenerated, are wrought upon in an irresistible manner, and are merely passive in it; and that those who are not thus wrought upon, their repentance and conversion is impossible. What the inconveniences of this opinion are, I have shewed at large.

The other extreme opinion is, that none are thus wrought upon, because it would be a violence and

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injury to man's natural liberty; but that sufficient grace is offered to all, one time or other, who live under the gospel, which they may comply with or resist; and consequently, if they be not brought to repentance, their impenitency and ruin is the effect of their own choice, and God is free from the blood of all men. But this opinion, though infinitely more reasonable than the other, seems not to have any necessary foundation either in Scripture or reason. There are some instances in Scripture of the conversion of men after a very violent, if not an irresistible manner, which seems to be attributed to a particular predestination of God; as that of St. Paul, who says of himself, (Gal. i. 15.) that he was separated from his mother's womb to that work to which he was called; and the manner of his conversion was answerable to such a predestination; and there is nothing in reason against this, since it is no injury to any man to be made good and happy against his will.

The two middle opinions are these:

First, That irresistible grace is afforded to all the elect, and sufficient grace to all others who live under the gospel (for of those only we speak, the case of others being peculiar, and belonging to the extraordinary mercy of God); but then they say, that none of those to whom this sufficient grace is afforded shall effectually comply with it, and be saved. This opinion seems more moderate, and hath this advantage in it, that it acquits the justice of God in the condemnation of those, who, having sufficient grace afforded to them, did yet notwithstanding continue impenitent; but yet it hath two great inconveniences in it.

First, That this supposition is to no purpose, as

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to any real effect for the salvation of men, because not one person more is saved, notwithstanding this universal sufficient grace, which they say is afforded to all; for they take it for granted it is never effectual; and then it seems very unreasonable to suppose, that a means sufficient to its end should universally prove ineffectual; nay, on the contrary, it is next to a demonstration against the sufficiency of a means, if perpetually and in all instances it fails of its end. This would tempt any man to think that surely there is some defect in it, or something that hinders the efficacy of it; if being perpetually and generally afforded, it doth perpetually and universally miscarry, without so much as one instance among so many millions to the contrary. So that this opinion seems rather to be contrived for a colour and shelter against some absurdity, which men know not how to avoid otherwise, than to serve any good purpose, or to be embraced for the truth and probability of it.

The other middle opinion is, that some are converted in an irresistible manner when God pleaseth, and whom he designs to be extraordinary examples and instruments for the good of others, and that sufficient grace is afforded to others, which is effectual to the salvation of many, and rejected by a great many. And this avoids all the inconveniency of the other opinion, and is evidently most agreeable both to the tenor of Scripture and to the best notions which men have concerning the attributes and perfections of God, and gives greatest encouragement to the endeavours of men. It agrees very well with the solemn declarations of Scripture, that God is not wanting, on his part, to afford men sufficient means to bring them to repentance; that he

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"desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" that "he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" that "he would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" that men's destruction is of themselves. And this makes all the exhortations and motives of Scripture to repentance to be of some force and significancy, and gives encouragement to the resolutions and endeavours of men to become better. This clearly acquits the justice of God in the condemnation of impenitent sinners, and fixeth the reason of their ruin upon their own choice. This perfectly reconciles the operation and assistance of God's grace in our conversion and regeneration, in our sanctification and perseverance in a good course, with the concurrence of our own endeavours, and makes those plain texts of Scripture have some sense and significancy in them: "Work out your own salvation; repent and turn yourselves from all your evil ways; make ye new hearts and new spirits." These are more than a thousand metaphors to convince a man, that we may, and ought to do, something towards our repentance and conversion. And if any man be sure that we neither do nor can do any thing in this work, then I am sure that these texts signify nothing. Finally, those texts which speak most clearly of the necessity of the Divine grace and assistance, to our doing of any thing that is spiritually good, do suppose something to be done on our part. That of our Saviour, "without me you can do nothing," implies, that with his grace and assistance we can. That of St. Paul, "I am able to do all things through Christ strengthening me," implies, that what we do by the strength of Christ,

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is truly our own act; "I am able to do all things." And this does not in the least prejudice nor obscure the glory of God's grace. St. Paul, it seems, knew very well how to reconcile these two, and to give the grace of God its due, without rejecting all concurrence of our own industry and endeavour: (1 Cor. xv. 10.) "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain;" not because it was irresistible, and he merely passive in the reception of it; but because he did concur and co-operate with it. So he tells us, "his grace, that was bestowed upon me, was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." So that our concurrence and endeavour in the doing of any thing that is good, does not derogate from the grace of God, provided that we ascribe the good which we do to the assistance of Divine grace, to which it is incomparably more due than to our own activity and endeavour. And so St. Paul does: "I laboured abundantly; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

So that the glory of God's grace may be advanced to its due pitch, without asserting that we are merely passive to the operations of it. God's grace may be abundantly bestowed upon us, and yet we may labour abundantly; God may work in us "to will and to do," and yet we may work out our own salvation. I have done with the second doctrine, grounded upon this metaphor of a new creature.

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SERMON CVIII.

OF THE NATURE OF REGENERATION, AND ITS NECESSITY IN ORDER TO JUSTIFICATION AND SALVATION.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature:—GALAT. vi. 15.

IN discoursing on these words, that which I was last upon, was to shew, that this metaphor of a new creature doth not import what some would extend it to, and that so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this, and other like metaphors; viz. such doctrines as these three:

First, That as the creation was by an irresistible act of the Divine power, so is this new creation, or the conversion of a sinner.

Secondly, That as creatures were merely passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we to our conversion and regeneration.

Thirdly, That as the creation was in an instant, only by the powerful word of God, so this new creation is in an instant, and admits of no degrees. The two first of these I have spoken to, and shewed, that as they had no necessary foundation in this and the like metaphors of Scripture, so they are contrary to reason and experience, and the plain and constant tenor of Scripture, which is the rule and measure of Christ's doctrine. I proceed, now, to consider the

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Third doctrine, which is grounded upon this metaphor; namely, that as the creation of the several ranks and orders of creatures was in an instant, and effected by the powerful word of God, saying, let such and such things be, and immediately they were; so this new creation is in an instant, and admits of no steps and degrees. And this doctrine is nothing else but a farther pursuit of the metaphor; and, admitting the two former doctrines to be true, and well-grounded upon this metaphor, this third doctrine follows well enough from them; for it is agreeable enough, that that which is effected by an irresistible act of omnipotence, without any concurrence or operation on our part, should be done in an instant, and all at once. Not that this is necessary, but that it is reasonable; for why should Omnipotence use delays, and take time, and proceed by degrees in the doing of that, which, with the same ease, it can do at once, and in an instant; especially considering how well this suits with the other metaphors of Scripture, as well as with this of a new creation; viz. the metaphor of regeneration and resurrection. A child is born at once; and the dead shall be raised in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

But, notwithstanding all this plausible appearance and conspiracy of metaphors, I shall shew that this doctrine of the conversion and regeneration of a sinner being effected in an instant, and all at once, is not well grounded, either upon Scripture or experience. Not but that God can do so if he pleaseth, and works this change in some much sooner and quicker than in others; but there is nothing, either in Scripture or experience, to persuade us that this is the usual, much less the constant and unalterable method of God's grace in the conversion of a sinner,

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to bring it about in an instant, without any sensible steps and degrees.

But, for the full clearing of this matter, I shall proceed by these steps:

First, I shall shew upon what mistaken grounds and principles this doctrine relies; besides the metaphors already mentioned, which I have shewn to be of no force to prove the thing.

Secondly, I shall plainly shew what regeneration is; by which it will appear, that it is not necessarily effected in an instant, and at once, but admits of degrees.

Thirdly, That it is evidently so in experience of the ordinary method of God's grace, both in those who are regenerated by a pious and religious education, and in those who are reclaimed from a vicious course of life.

Fourthly, That all this is very consonant and agreeable to what the Scripture plainly and constantly declares concerning it.

First, I shall discover several mistakes upon which this doctrine is grounded, besides the metaphors already mentioned, and which I have shewn to be of no force to prove the thing; viz. That regeneration is in an instant, and admits of no degrees. As,

1. That regeneration and sanctification are not only different expressions, but do signify two things really different. But this is a gross mistake; for regeneration and sanctification are but different expressions of the self-same thing; for regeneration is a metaphor which the Scripture useth to express our translation and change from one state to another; from a state of sin and wickedness to a state of grace and holiness, as if we were born over again,

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and were the children of another father; and, from being the children of the devil, did become the children of God; and sanctification is our being made holy, our being purified and cleansed from sin and impurity. And hence it is, that regeneration and sanctification are attributed to the same causes, principal and instrumental, to the Spirit of God, and to the word of God. We are said to be "born of the Spirit," and to be "sanctified by the Holy Ghost;" to be begotten of the "word of truth," and to be "sanctified by the truth," which is, "the word of God." So that the Scripture speaks of them as the same thing; and they must needs be so; for if sanctification be the making of us holy, and regeneration maketh us holy, then regeneration is sanctification.

2. It is said that regeneration only signifies our first entrance into this state, and sanctification our progress and continuance in it. But this likewise is a great mistake: for though it be true that regeneration doth signify our first entrance into this state, yet it is not true that it only signifies that; for it is used likewise in Scripture to signify our continuance in that state; for Christians are said to be the "children of God," and consequently in a regenerate state; not only in the instant of this change, but during their continuance in it. Besides that, our first change is as well called our sanctification, as our progress and continuance in a state of holiness. So that neither in this is there any difference between regeneration and sanctification. They do both of them signify both our first entrance into an holy state, and our continuance and progress in it; though regeneration do more frequently denote the making of this change, and our first entrance into it,

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3. It is said that one of the main differences between regeneration and sanctification is this—that regeneration is incapable of degrees, and all that are regenerate are equally so, and one regenerate person is not more or less regenerate than another; whereas sanctification is a gradual progress from one degree of holiness to another, and of them that are truly sanctified and holy, one may be more sanctified and more holy than another. But this likewise is a mere fancy and imagination, without any real ground. For as an unregenerate state does plainly admit of degrees, so likewise doth the regenerate, and for the same reason. That an unregenerate state admits of degrees is evident, in that some unregenerate persons are more wicked than others, and thereby more the children of wrath and the devil than others, which are the Scripture expressions concerning the degrees of men's wickedness and impiety. In like manner, they that are more holy, and more like God, are more the children of God; and to be more a child of God, is surely to be more regenerate; that is, more renewed after the image of God, which consists in righteousness and true holiness. So that it is a mere precarious assertion, and evidently false to affirm, that regeneration doth not admit of degrees, and that one is not more regenerate than another.

Fourthly and lastly, They ground this conceit upon the doctrine of the schools, which teach, that in regeneration and conversion all the habits of grace are infused, *simul et semel*, together and at once. I confess I have no regard, much less a veneration, for the doctrine of the schools, where it differs from that of the Holy Scriptures, which say not one word of infused habits, which yet are much

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talked of in divinity; and, to speak the truth, these words serve only to obscure the thing. For to say that in conversion the habits of all graces and virtues are infused together and at once, is to say, that, in an instant, men that were vicious before in several kinds are, by an omnipotent act of God's grace, and by a new principle infused into them, endued with the habits of the contrary graces and virtues, and are as chaste, and temperate, and just, and meek, and humble, as if, by the frequent practice of these virtues, they had become so. That this may be, and sometimes is, I am so far from denying, that I believe it to be so. Some men, by an extraordinary power of God's grace upon their hearts, are suddenly changed, and strangely reclaimed from a very wicked and vicious, to a very religious and virtuous course of life; and that which others attain to by slower degrees, and great conflicts with themselves, before they can gain the upper hand of their lusts, these arrive at, all on a sudden, by a mighty resolution wrought in them by the power of God's grace, and as it were a new bias and inclination put upon their souls, equal to an habit gained by long use and custom. This God sometimes does, and when he does this, it may in some sense be called the infusion of the habits of grace and virtue together, and at once; because the man is hereby endowed with a principle of equal force and power with habits that are acquired by long use and practice. A strong and vigorous faith is the principle and root of all graces and virtues, and may have such a powerful influence upon the resolutions of our minds, and the government of our actions, that from this principle all graces and virtues may spring and grow up by degrees into habits; but then this principle

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is not formally, but virtually, in the power and efficacy of it, the infusion of the habits of every grace and virtue; and even in those persons, in whom this change is so suddenly, and as it were at once, I doubt not but that the habits of several graces and virtues are afterwards attained by the frequent practice of them, in the virtue of this powerful principle of the faith of the gospel, as I shall shew in the progress of this discourse. And this, I doubt not, was very frequent and visible in many of the first converts to Christianity; especially of those who, from the abominable idolatry and impiety of heathenism, were gained to the Christian religion. The Spirit of God did then work very miraculously, as well in the cures of spiritual as of bodily diseases. But then, to make this the rule and standard of God's ordinary proceedings, in the conversion and regeneration of men, is equally unreasonable, as still to expect miracles for the cure of diseases; and it is certain in experience, that this is not God's ordinary method in the conversion of sinners, as I shall fully shew by and by.

Secondly, I shall shew what regeneration is; by which it will plainly appear, that there is no necessity that it should be effected in an instant, and at once, but that it will admit of degrees. I do not deny that it may be in an instant, and at once. The power of God is able to do this, and sometimes does it very thoroughly and very suddenly. But the question is, whether there be a necessity it should be so, and always be so. Now regeneration is—the change of a man's state, from a state of sin to a state of holiness; which, because it is an entrance upon a new kind or course of life, it is fitly resembled to regeneration, or a new birth; to a new

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creation; the man being, as it were, quite changed, or made over again, so as not to be, as to the main purpose and design of his life, the same man he was before. This is a plain sensible account of the thing, which every one may easily understand. Now there is nothing in reason, why a man may not gradually be changed and arrive at this state by degrees, as well as after this change is made, and he arrived at this state of a regenerate man, he may by degrees grow and improve in it. But the latter no man doubts of, but that a man that is in a state of grace may grow and improve in grace; and there is as little reason to question why a man may not come to this state by degrees, as well as leap into it at once.

All the difficulty I know of in this matter is a mere nicety, that there is an instant in which every thing begins, and therefore regeneration is in an instant; so that the instant before the man arrived at this state, it could not be said that he was regenerate; and the instant after he is in this state, it cannot be denied that he is so. But this is idle subtilty, just as if a man should prove that a house was built in an instant, because it could not be said to be built till the instant it was finished; though, for all this, nothing is more certain than that it was built by degrees. Or, suppose the time of arriving at man's estate be at one and twenty, does it from hence follow, that a man does not grow to be a man by degrees, but is made a man in an instant; because just before one and twenty he was not at man's estate, and just then he was? Not but that God, if he please, can make a man in an instant, as he did Adam; but it is not necessary, from this example, that all men should be made so, much less

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length, by the grace of God, they come to a fixed purpose and resolution of forsaking their sins, and turning to God; and, after many strugglings and conflicts with their lusts, and the strong bias of evil habits, this resolution, assisted by the grace of God, doth effectually prevail, and make a real change both in the temper of their minds, and the course of their lives; and when this is done, and not before, they are said to be regenerate. But all the while this was doing, the new man was forming, and the work of regeneration was going on; and it was, perhaps, a very considerable time, from the beginning of it, till it came to a fixed and settled state. And this, I doubt not, in experience of most persons who are reclaimed from a vicious course of life, is found to be the usual and ordinary method of God's grace in their conversion; and, if so, it is in vain to pretend that a thing is done in an instant, which by so manifold experience is found to take up a great deal of time, and to be effected by degrees.

And whereas some men are pleased to call all this the preparatory work to regeneration, but not the regeneration itself; this is an idle contention about words. For if these preparations be a degree of goodness, and a gradual tendency towards it, then the work is begun by them, and, during the continuance of them, is all the while a doing; and though it be hard to fix the point or instant when a man just arrives at this state, and not before, yet it is very sensible when a man is in it; and this change, when it is really made, will soon discover itself by plain and sensible effects.

Fourthly and lastly, All this is very agreeable to the plain and constant tenor of Scripture, (Isa. i. 16.) where the prophet exhorts to this change, he speaks

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of it as a gradual thing, "Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well;" that is, break off evil and vicious habits, and gain the contrary habits of virtue and goodness by the exercise of it. The Scripture speaks of some as farther from a state of grace than others: (Jer. xiii. 23.) "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil;" plainly declaring the great difficulty, equal almost to a natural impossibility, of reclaiming those to goodness, who have been long habituated to an evil course. And the Scripture speaks of some as nearer to a state of grace than others. Our Saviour tells the young man in the gospel, who said he had kept the commands of God from his youth, that he was "not far from the kingdom of God." But now, if, by an irresistible act of God's power, this change be made in an instant, and cannot otherwise be made, how is one man nearer to a state of grace, or farther from it than another? If all that are made good, must be made so in an instant, or not at all, then no man is nearer being made good than another; for if he were nearer to it, he might sooner be made so; but that cannot be, if all must be made good in an instant; for sooner than that no man can be made so. If the similitude of our being dead in sins and trespasses be strictly taken, no man is nearer a resurrection to a new life than another: as he that died but a week ago, is as far from being raised to life again, as he that died a thousand years ago; the resurrection of both requires an omnipotent act, and to that both are equally easy.

The two parables of our Saviour, (Matt. xiii. 31.

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33.) are by many interpreters understood of the gradual operation of grace upon the hearts of men. That wherein "the kingdom of heaven is likened to a grain of mustard-seed, which being sown was the least of all seeds," but, by degrees, "grew up to be the greatest of herbs;" and "to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened:" intimating the progress of God's grace, which by degrees diffuseth itself over the whole temper of a man's mind, into all the actions of his life. To be sure the parable of "the seed, which fell upon good ground," does represent the efficacy of the word of God, accompanied by his grace upon the minds of men, and that is said to spring up, and increase, and to bring forth fruit with patience; which surely does express to us the gradual operation of God's word and grace in the renovation and change of a man's heart and life.

The New Testament, indeed, speaks of the sudden change of many upon the first preaching of the gospel, which I have told you before is not a standard of the ordinary method of God's grace; the not considering of which hath been a great cause of all the mistakes in this matter. It is true, those which were thus converted to the belief of the gospel, their faith was a virtual principle of all grace and virtue, though not formerly the habit of every particular grace. St. Paul himself, who was a prime instance of this kind, speaks as if he acquired the grace of contentment by great consideration and diligent care of himself in several conditions; not as if the habit of this grace had been infused into him at once: (Phil. iv. 11, 12.) 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where and in all

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things I am instructed, both to be full, and to be hungry; both to abound, and to suffer need." And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to consider; namely, the true and just importance of this metaphor of the new creation. The two particulars which remain, I shall, by God's assistance, finish in my next discourse.

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SERMON CIX.

OF THE NATURE OF REGENERATION, AND ITS NECESSITY, IN ORDER TO JUSTIFICATION AND SALVATION.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.—GAL. vi. 15.

THE observation I am still upon from these words is this: viz. That in the Christian religion nothing will avail to our justification, but the renovation of our hearts and lives, expressed here by "a new creature." In treating of which, I proposed the doing of three things:

First, To shew the true import of this metaphor of "a new creature."

Secondly, To shew that this is the great condition of our justification; and,

Thirdly, That it is highly reasonable that it should be so.

In treating of the first of these particulars, I have considered some doctrines as founded upon this metaphor, which I have shewn at large not only to have no foundation in Scripture, or reason, or experience,; but also to be very unreasonable in themselves, and contrary to the plain and constant tenor of Scripture, and to the ordinary method of God's grace in the regeneration of men, whether by a religious and virtuous education, or in those who are reclaimed from a notorious wicked course of life.

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And that I have so long insisted upon this argument, and handled it in a more contentious way than is usual with me, did not proceed from any love to controversy, which I am less fond of every day than other; but from a great desire to put an end to these controversies, and quarrellings in the dark, by bringing them to a clear state and plain issue, and likewise to undeceive good men concerning some current notions and doctrines, which I do really believe to be dishonourable to God, and contrary to the plain declarations of Scripture, and a cause of great perplexity and discomfort to the minds of men, and a real discouragement to the resolutions and endeavours of becoming better. Upon which considerations I was strongly urgent to search these doctrines to the bottom, and to contribute what in me lay, to the rescuing of good men from the disquiet and entanglement of them.

I will conclude this matter with a few cautions, not unworthy to be remembered by us: that we would be careful so to ascribe all good to God, that we be sure we ascribe nothing to him that is evil, or any ways unworthy of him; that we do not make him the sole author of our salvation, in such a way, as will unavoidably charge upon him the final impenitency and ruin of a great part of mankind; that we do not so magnify the grace of God, as to make his precepts and exhortations signify nothing; such as these: "Make ye new hearts, and new spirits, strive to enter in at the strait gate;" where, if by the strait gate be meant the difficulty of our first entrance upon a religious course, that is, of our conversion and regeneration, I cannot imagine how it is possible to reconcile our being merely passive in this work, and doing nothing at all in it, with our Saviour's precept

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of striving "to enter in at the strait gate;" unless to be very active and to be merely passive about the same thing be all one, and an earnest contention and endeavour be the same thing with doing nothing. Again, that we do not make the utmost degeneracy and depravation which men ever arrived at by the greatest abuse of themselves, and the most vile and wicked practices, the standard of an unregenerate state, and of the common condition of all men by nature. And, lastly, that we do not make some particular instances in Scripture, of the strange and sudden conversion of some persons, (as namely, of St. Paul and the jailor, in the Acts) the common rule and measure of every man's conversion; so that unless a man be, as it were, struck down by a light and power from heaven, and taken with a fit of trembling, and frighted almost out of his wits, or find in himself something equal to this, he can have no assurance of his conversion; whereas a much surer judgment may be made of the sincerity of a man's conversion, by the real effects of this change, than by the manner of it. This our Saviour hath taught us, by that apt resemblance of the operation of God's Spirit to the blowing of the wind, of the original cause whereof, and of the reason of its ceasing or continuance, and why it blows stronger or gentler, this way or that way, we are altogether ignorant; but that it is, we are sensible from the sound of it: (John iii. 8.) "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound of it, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The effects of God's Holy Spirit in the regeneration of men are sensible, though the manner and degrees of his operation upon the souls of men are so various, that

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we can give no account of them; by which, one would think, our Saviour had sufficiently cautioned us, not to reduce the operations of God's grace and Holy Spirit in the regeneration of men, to any certain rule or standard, but chiefly to regard the sensible effects of this secret work upon the hearts and lives of men.

And, after all, it is in vain to contend by any arguments against clear and certain experience. If we plainly see that many are insensibly changed, and made good by pious education "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" and that some who have long lived in a profane neglect and contempt of religion, are by the secret power of God's word and Holy Spirit, upon calm consideration, without any great terrors and amazements, visibly changed and brought to a better mind and course; it is in vain, in these cases, to pretend that this change is not real, because the manner of it is not answerable to some instances which are recorded in Scripture, or which we have observed in our experience; and because these persons cannot give such an account of the time and manner of their conversion, as is agreeable to these instances; which is just as if I should meet a man beyond sea, whom I had known in England, and would not believe that he had crossed the seas, because he said he had a smooth and easy passage, and was wafted over by a gentle wind, and could tell no stories of storms and tempests.

And thus I have fully and faithfully endeavoured to open to you the just importance of this phrase or expression in the text, of the "new creature," or the new creation. I proceed to the

Second particular I propounded; namely, That

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the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is, according to the terms of the gospel and the Christian religion, the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, and that this is the same in sense and substance with those phrases in the parallel texts to this, of faith perfected by charity, and of keeping the commandments of God.

That, according to the terms of the gospel, the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, is the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is plain, not only from this text, which affirms, that, in the Christian religion, nothing will avail us but the "new creature;" but, likewise, from many other clear texts of Scripture; and this, whether by justification be meant our first justification upon our faith and repentance, or our continuance in this state, or our final justification by our solemn acquittal and absolution at the great day, which in Scripture is called "salvation" and "eternal life."

That this is the condition of our first justification; that is, of the forgiveness of our sins, and our being received into the grace and favour of God, is plain from all those texts where this change is expressed by our repentance and conversion, by our regeneration and renovation, by our purification and sanctification, or by any other terms of the like importance. For under every one of these notions, this change is made the condition of the forgiveness of our sins, and acceptance to the favour of God.

Under the notion of repentance and conversion. (Acts ii. 38.) "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." (Acts iii. 19.) "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Upon the same account, the penitent acknowledgment of our sins,

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which is an essential part of repentance, is made a condition of the forgiveness of them. (1 John i. 9.) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Under the notion of regeneration and renovation. (2 Cor. v. 17.) "If any man be in Christ, (that is, become a true Christian, which is all one with being in a justified state) he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." (Tit. iii. 3—7.) where the apostle declares at large what change is required to put us into a justified state, and to entitle us to the inheritance of eternal life: "for we ourselves were also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, (that is, not for any precedent righteousness of ours, for we were great sinners) but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." So that the change of our former temper, and conversion, and regeneration, and "the renewing of the Holy Ghost," is antecedently necessary to our justification; that is, to the pardon of our sins, and our restitution to the favour of God, and the hope of eternal life. So, likewise, under the notion of purification and sanctification, (1 Cor. vi. 9—11.) where the apostle enumerates several sins and vices, which will certainly exclude men from the favour and kingdom of God, from which we must be cleansed

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before we can be justified or saved: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.) where the apostle, likewise, makes our purification a condition of our being received into the favour of God, and reckoned into the number of his children: "touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." And that by not touching "the unclean thing," is here certainly meant our sanctification and purification from sin, is evident from what immediately follows in the beginning of the next chapter; "having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God;" that is, having this encouragement, that upon this condition we shall be received to the favour of God, let us purify ourselves, that we may be capable of this great blessing.

And our continuance in this state of grace and favour with God, depends upon our perseverance in holiness; for "if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

And, lastly, This is also the condition of our final justification and absolution, by the sentence of the great day: (Matt. v. 8.) "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (John iii. 3.) "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Heb. xii. 14.) "Follow holiness, without

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which no man shall see the Lord." (1 John iii. 3.) The apostle there, speaking of the blessed sight and enjoyment of God, tells us what we must do if ever we hope to be partakers of it: "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

And this condition here mentioned in the text, of our being new creatures, is the same in sense and substance with those expressions which we find in the two parallel texts to this, where faith, which is perfected by charity, and keeping the commandments of God, are made the condition of our justification and acceptance with God. (Gal. v. 6.) "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith, which is consummate" or "made perfect by charity;" and (1 Cor. vii. 19.) "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God." It is evident that the design and meaning of these three texts is the same, and therefore these three expressions of the "new creature," and of "faith perfected by charity," and of "keeping the commandments of God," do certainly signify the same thing. That the "new creature" signifies the change of our state, from a state of disobedience and sin, to a state of obedience and holiness of life, I have shewn at large; and the apostle explaining this new creation, most expressly tells us, (Ephes. ii. 10.) "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them;" and, (Colos. iii. 10. 12—14.) where the apostle tells them, that they ought to give testimony of their renovation, and having put on "the new man," by all the fruits of obedience and goodness; "ye have put on the new

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man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; and above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection." And the apostle St. Peter tells us, that our regeneration, which he calls sanctification of the Spirit, is unto obedience." (1 Pet. i. 2.) So that our renovation consisteth in the principle and practice of obedience, and a good life; and what is this but faith perfected by charity? And charity, the apostle tells us, "is the fulfilling of the law;" and what is "the fulfilling of the law," but "keeping the commandments of God?" And "keeping the commandments of God," or, at least, a sincere resolution of obedience, when there is not time and opportunity for the trial of it, is in Scripture as expressly made a condition both of our present and final justification and acceptance with God, as faith is; and in truth is the same with a living and operative faith, and a faith that is consummate, and made perfect by charity. (Acts x. 34, 35.) "Of a truth I perceive (saith St. Peter) that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him;" which speech does, as plainly as words can do any thing, declare to us upon what terms all mankind, of what condition or nation soever, may find acceptance with God. (Rom. ii. 6—10.) "Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but to them who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteous-

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ness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil; of the Jew first, and also of the gentile: but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the gentile." As to our acceptance with God, and the rewards of another world, it matters not whether Jew or gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised; that which maketh the difference, is obeying the truth, or obeying unrighteousness; working good, or doing evil; these are the things which will avail to our justification, or condemnation, at the great day. To the same purpose is that saying of the apostle to the Hebrews, (chap. v. 9.) that "Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him."

I will conclude this matter with two remarkable sayings; the one towards the beginning, the other towards the end of the Bible; to satisfy us that this is the tenor of the Holy Scriptures, and the constant doctrine of it from the beginning to the end. (Gen. iv. 7.) It is God's speech to Cain, "If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted?" and (Rev. xxii. 14.) "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

And thus I have done with the second thing I propounded; which was to shew, that according to the terms of the gospel, and the Christian religion, the real renovation of our hearts and lives is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, and that this in sense and substance is the same with faith "made perfect with charity," and keeping the commandments of God.

The third and last particular remains to be spoken to; namely, That it is highly reasonable that this

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should be the condition of our justification and acceptance to the favour of God; and that upon these two accounts:

First, For the honour of God's holiness.

Secondly, In order to the qualifying of us for the favour of God, and the enjoyment of him, for the pardon of our sins, and the reward of eternal life.

First, For the honour of God's holiness. For should God have received men to his favour, and rewarded them with eternal glory and happiness, for the mere belief of the gospel, or a confident persuasion that Christ would save them, without any change of their hearts and lives, without repentance from dead works, and fruits meet for repentance, and amendment of life; he had not given sufficient testimony to the world of his love to holiness and righteousness, and of his hatred of sin and iniquity. The apostle tells us, that God in the justification of a sinner declares his righteousness; but should he justify men upon other terms, this would not declare his righteousness, and love of holiness, but rather an indifferency, whether men were good and righteous or not. For a bare assent to the truth of the gospel, without the fruits of holiness and obedience, is not a living, but a dead faith, and so far from being acceptable to God, that it is an affront to him; and a confident reliance upon Christ for salvation, while we continue in our sins, is not a justifying faith, but a bold and impudent presumption upon the mercy of God, and the merits of our Saviour; who indeed justifies the ungodly; that is, those that have been so, but not those that continue so. And if God should pardon sinners, and reward them with eternal life, upon any other terms than upon our becoming new creatures, than upon such

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a faith as is "made perfect by charity;" that is, by keeping the commands of God; this would be so far from declaring his righteousness, and being a testimony of his hatred and displeasure against sin, that it would give the greatest countenance and encouragement to it imaginable.

Secondly, It is likewise very reasonable, that such a faith, that makes us new creatures, and is perfected by charity, and keeping the commandments of God, should be the condition of justification, in order to the qualifying of us for the pardon of our sins, and the reward of eternal life; that is, for the favour of God, and for the enjoyment of him. To forgive men upon other terms, were to give countenance and encouragement to perpetual rebellion and disobedience. That man is not fit to be forgiven, who is so far from being sorry for his fault, that he goes on to offend; he is utterly incapable of mercy, who is not sensible that he hath done amiss, and resolved to amend. No prince ever thought a rebellious subject capable of pardon upon lower terms than these. It is in the nature of the thing unfit that an obstinate offender should have any mercy or favour shewn to him.

And as without repentance and resolution of better obedience, we are unfit for forgiveness, so much more for a reward; as we cannot expect God's favour, so we are incapable of the enjoyment of him without holiness. Holiness is the image of God, and makes us like to him; and, till we be like him, we cannot see him, we can have no enjoyment of him. All delightful communion and agreeable society is founded on a similitude of disposition and manners; and therefore so long as we are unlike to God in the temper and disposition of our minds, and in the

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actions and course of our lives, neither can God take pleasure in us, nor we in him, but there will be a perpetual jarring and discord between him and us; and though we were in heaven, and seated in the place of the blessed, yet we should not, nay we could not, be happy; because we should want the necessary materials and ingredients of happiness. For it is with the soul, in this respect, as it is with the body; though all things be easy without us, and no cruelty be exercised upon us, to give torment and vexation to us, yet if we be inwardly diseased, we may have pain and anguish enough; we may be as it were upon the rack, and feel as great torment from the inward disorder of our humours, as if we were tortured from without. So it is with the soul; sin and vice are internal diseases, which do naturally create trouble and discontent, and nothing but diversion, and the variety of objects and pleasures, which entertain men in this world, hinders a wicked man from being out of his wits, whenever he reflects upon himself; for all the irregular appetites and passions, lust, and malice, and revenge, are so many furies within us; and though there were no devil to torment us, yet the disorder of our own minds, and the horrors of a guilty conscience, would be a hell to us, and make us extremely miserable in the very regions of happiness. So that it is necessary that our faith should be "made perfect by charity," and that we should become new creatures; not only from the arbitrary constitution and appointment of God, but from the nature and reason of the thing; because nothing but this can dispose us for that blessedness, which God hath promised to us, and prepared for us. Faith, considered abstractedly from the fruits of holiness and

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obedience, of goodness and charity, will bring no man into the favour of God. All the excellency of faith is, that it is the principle of a good life, and furnisheth us with the best motives and arguments thereto, the promises and threatenings of the gospel; and therefore in heaven, when we come to sight and enjoyment, faith and hope shall cease, but "charity never faileth;" for if it should, heaven would cease to be heaven to us, because it is the very frame and temper of happiness; and if this disposition be not wrought in us in this world, we shall be altogether incapable of the felicity of the other.

You see, then, what it is that must recommend us to the favour of God; the real renovation of our hearts and lives, "after the image of him that created us." This must be repaired in us, before ever we can hope to be restored to the grace and favour of God, or to be capable of the reward of eternal life. And what could God have done more reasonable, than to make these very things the terms of our salvation, which are the necessary causes and means of it? How could he have dealt more mercifully and kindly with us, than to appoint that to be the condition of our happiness, which is the only qualification that can make us capable of it?

I will conclude all with that excellent passage in the Wisdom of Solomon: (chap. vi. 17, 18.) "The very true beginning of wisdom is the desire of discipline, and the care of discipline is love, and love is the keeping of her laws, and taking heed to her laws is the assurance of incorruption." The sum of what I have said upon this argument amounts to this, that upon the terms of the gospel we can have no hope of the forgiveness of our sins and eternal salvation, unless our nature be renewed, and the

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image of God, which is defaced by sin, be repaired in us, and we be created in Christ unto good works; that no faith will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but that which is made perfect by charity; that is, by fulfilling of the law, and keeping the commandments of God: by sincere obedience and holiness of life, which, notwithstanding the unavoidable imperfection of it in this state, will nevertheless be accepted with God, through the merits of our blessed Saviour, "who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. To whom be glory for ever." Amen.

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SERMON CX.

THE DANGER OF ALL KNOWN SIN, BOTH FROM THE LIGHT OF NATURE AND REVELATION.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them.—ROM. i. 18, 19.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the apostle declares that he was particularly designed and appointed by God to preach the gospel to the world, and that he was not ashamed of his ministry, notwithstanding all the reproach and persecution it was attended withal, and notwithstanding the slight and undervaluing opinion which the world had of the doctrine which he preached, it being "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" for though this might reflect some disparagement upon it in the esteem of sensual and carnal men, yet to those who weighed things impartially, and considered the excellent end and design of the Christian doctrine, and the force and efficacy of it to that end, it will appear to be an instrument admirably fitted, by the wisdom of God, for the reformation and salvation of mankind.

And therefore he tells us, (ver. 16.) that how much soever it was despised by that ignorant and inconsiderate age, he was "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ;" because "it is the power of God unto sal-

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vation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first; and also to the Greek:" that is, the doctrine of the gospel sincerely believed and embraced, is a most proper and powerful means, designed by God for the salvation of mankind; not only of the Jews, but also of the gentiles.

The revelations which God had formerly made, were chiefly restrained to the Jewish nation; but this great and last revelation of the gospel, was equally calculated for the benefit and advantage of all mankind. The gospel, indeed, was first preached to the Jews, and from thence published to the whole world; and as this doctrine was designed for the general benefit of mankind, so it was very likely to be effectual to that end, being an instrument equally fitted for the salvation of the whole world, gentiles as well as Jews; "it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

And to shew the efficacy of it, he instanceth in two things, which render it so powerful and effectual a means for the salvation of mankind.

First, Because therein the grace and mercy of God, in the justification of a sinner, and declaring him righteous, is so clearly revealed. (ver. 17.) "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith." This is very obscurely expressed, but the meaning of this text will be very much cleared, by comparing it with another in the third chapter of this Epistle, (ver. 20, 21, 22, &c.) where the apostle speaks more fully and expressly of the way of our justification by the faith of Jesus Christ; that is, by the belief of the gospel. He asserts, at the 20th verse, that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh

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be justified in the sight of God." To this way of justification, "by the deeds of the law," he opposeth "the righteousness of God by the faith of Jesus Christ, to all, and upon all them that believe," which is the gospel way of justification: (ver. 21, 22.) "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe." "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested;" that is, the way which God hath taken to justify sinners, and declare them righteous "without the deeds of the law;" that is, without observing the law of Moses, "is manifested;" that is, is clearly revealed in the gospel, (which is the same with what the apostle had said before, that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel) "being witnessed by the law and the prophets;" that is, "the righteousness of God," or the justification of sinners by Jesus Christ, is clearly revealed in the gospel, being also in a more obscure manner attested or foretold in the Old Testament, which he calls "the law and the prophets;" and this fully explains that difficult phrase of "the righteousness of God being revealed by the gospel, from faith to faith;" that is, by a gradual revelation, being more obscurely foretold in the Old Testament, and clearly discovered in the New; so that these two passages are equivalent: in the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; and the righteousness of God without the works of the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." There is the first and more imperfect revelation of it, but the clear revelation of it is in the gospel; this the apostle calls a revelation "from faith to faith;" that is,

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from a more imperfect and obscure, to a more express and clear, discovery and belief of it. And then the citation which follows is very pertinent, "as it is written, the just shall live by faith;" for this citation out of the Old Testament plainly shews, that the way of justification by faith was there mentioned; or, as our apostle expresseth it, was "witnessed by the law and the prophets;" and consequently, that this was a gradual discovery, which he calls a revelation "from faith to faith." "The just shall live by faith;" that is, good men shall be saved by their faith; shall be justified and esteemed righteous in the sight of God, and finally saved by their faith. And so the apostle in the fifth chapter of this Epistle, (ver. 18.) calls our justification by the faith of the gospel, the justification of life, in opposition to condemnation and death, which very well explains that saying of the prophet, "the just shall live by faith." I have been the longer upon this, that I might give some light to a very difficult and obscure text.

Secondly, The other instance, whereby the apostle proves the gospel to be so powerful a means for the recovery and salvation of men, is, that therein also the severity of God against impenitent sinners, as well as his grace and mercy in the justification of the penitent, is clearly revealed: (ver. 18.) "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" because that which may be known of God is manifested in them, for God hath shewn it unto them. The first, viz. the grace of God in our justification and the remission of sins past, is a most proper and powerful argument to encourage us to obedience for the future; nothing

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being more likely to reclaim men to their duty, than the assurance of indemnity for past crimes; and the other is one of the most effectual considerations in the world to deter men from sin, that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," &c.

From which words I shall observe these six things:

First, The infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth plainly expose men to. "The wrath of God" is here said to be "revealed against the impiety and unrighteousness of men."

Secondly, The clear and undoubted revelation which the gospel hath made of this danger, "The wrath of God" against the sins of men is said to be "revealed from heaven."

Thirdly, That every wicked and vicious practice doth expose men to this great danger. "The wrath of God is" said to be "revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

Fourthly, That it is a very great aggravation of sin, for men to offend against the light of their own minds. The apostle here aggravates the impiety and wickedness of the heathen world, that they did not live up to the knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, which he calls "holding the truth in unrighteousness."

Fifthly, The natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live wickedly, is a clear evidence of their "holding the truth in unrighteousness." The apostle therefore chargeth them with "holding the truth in unrighteousness," because that which may be known of God is manifested in them, God having shewed it to them.

Sixthly and lastly, That the clear revelation of

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the wrath of God in the gospel, against the impiety and wickedness of men, renders it a very powerful and likely means for the recovery and salvation of men. For the apostle proves "the gospel of Christ" to be "the power of God to salvation;" because "therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" that is, against all impenitent sinners.

I shall, at the present, by God's assistance, speak to the three first of these particulars.

First, The infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth plainly expose men to. If there be a God that made the world, and governs it, and takes care of mankind, and hath given them laws and rules to live by, he cannot but be greatly displeased at the violation and transgression of them; and certainly the displeasure of God is the most dreadful thing in the world, and the effects of it the most insupportable. The greatest fear is from the greatest danger, and the greatest danger is from the greatest power offended and enraged; and this is a consideration exceeding full of terror, that by a sinful course we expose ourselves to the utmost displeasure of the great and terrible God; for "who knows the power of his wrath? and who may stand before him when once he is angry? According to thy fear, so is thy wrath," saith the psalmist. There is no passion in the mind of man that is more boundless and infinite than our fear; it is apt to make wild and frightful representations of evils, and to imagine them many times greater than really they are; but in this case our imagination must fall short of the truth and terror of the thing; for the wrath of God doth far exceed the utmost jealousy and suspicion of the most fearful

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and guilty conscience; and the greatest sinner under his greatest anguish and despair, cannot apprehend or fear it more than there is reason for; "according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

If it were only the wrath and displeasure of men that the sinner were exposed to, there might be reason enough for fear; because they have many times power enough to crush an offender, and cruelty enough to fret every vein of his body, and to torment him in every part: but the wrath and vengeance of men bears no comparison with the wrath of God. Their passions are many times strong and blustering; but their arm is but short, and their power small; they have not an arm like God, nor can they thunder with a voice like him. They may design considerable harm and mischief to us; but it is not always in the power of their hand to wreak their malice upon us, and to execute all the mischief which their enraged minds may prompt them to; the very utmost they can design is to torment our bodies, and to take away our lives; and when they have designed this, they may die first, and return to their dust, and then their thoughts perish with them, and all their malicious designs are at an end: they are always under the power and government of a superior Being, and can go no farther than he gives them leave. However, if they do their worst, and shoot all their arrows at us, we cannot stand at the mark long, their wrath will soon make an end of us, and set us free from all their cruelty and oppression; they can but "kill the body, and after that they have no more that they can do;" their most refined malice cannot reach our spirits, no weapon that can be formed by the utmost art of man can pierce and wound our souls; they can drive us out of this world,

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but they cannot pursue us into the other; so that at the worst the grave will be a sanctuary to us, and death a safe retreat from all their rage and fury.

But the wrath of God is not confined by any of these limits. "Once hath God spoken, (saith David, by an elegant Hebrew phrase, to express the certainty of the thing) once hath God spoken, and twice I have heard this, that power belongs to God." (Psal. lxii. 11.) He hath a mighty arm, and when he pleaseth to stretch it out, none may stay it, nor say unto him, What dost thou?" he hath power enough to make good all his threatenings, whatever he says he is able to effect, and whatever he purposeth he can bring to pass: for "his counsel shall stand, and he will accomplish all his pleasure;" he need but speak the word, and it is done; for we can neither resist his power, nor fly from it: if we fly to the utmost parts of the earth, his hand can reach us; for "in his hands are all the corners of the earth:" if we take refuge in the grave (and we cannot do that without his leave) thither his wrath can follow us; and there it will overtake us; for his power is not confined to this world, nor limited to our bodies; "after he hath killed, he can destroy both body and soul in hell.

And this is that "wrath of God which is revealed from heaven," and which the apostle chiefly intends; viz. the misery and punishment of another world. This God hath threatened sinners withal: to express which to us, as fully as words can do, he heaps up in the next chapter so many weighty and terrible words—"indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil;" in opposition to that great and glorious reward of "im-

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mortality and eternal life," which is promised to a "patient continuance in well-doing."

So that "the wrath of God," which is here denounced "against the impiety and unrighteousness of men," comprehends all the evils and miseries of this and the other world, which every sinner is in danger of whilst he continues impenitent; for as, according to the tenor of the gospel, "godliness hath the promise of this life, and of that which is to come;" so impotency in sin exposeth men to the evils of both worlds; to the judgments of "the life that now is," and to the endless and intolerable torments "of that which is to come." And what can be more dreadful than the displeasure of an almighty and eternal Being? who can punish to the utmost, and who lives for ever, to execute his wrath and vengeance upon sinners; so that well might the apostle say, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

"Consider this all ye that forget God," that neglect him, and live in continual disobedience to his holy and righteous laws; much more those who despise and affront him, and live in a perpetual defiance of him. "Will ye provoke the Lord to jealousy? are ye stronger than he?" Think of it seriously, and forget him if you can, despise him if you dare; consider this, lest he take you into consideration, and rouse like a lion out of sleep, and "tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." This is the first observation; the infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth expose men to, the wrath of God, which doth not only signify more than all the evils that we know, but than all those which the wildest fears and suspicions of our minds can imagine.

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Secondly, The next thing observable, is the clear and undoubted revelation which the gospel hath made of this danger, "the wrath of God is revealed," &c. By which the apostle intimates to us, that this was but obscurely known to the world before, at least in comparison of that clear discovery which the gospel hath now made of it; so that I may allude to that expression in Job, which he applies to death and the grave, that "hell is naked before us, and destruction hath no covering."

Not but that mankind had always apprehensions and jealousies of the danger of a wicked life, and sinners were always afraid of the vengeance of God pursuing their evil deeds, not only in this life, but after it too; and though they had turned the punishments of another world into ridiculous fables, yet the wiser sort of mankind could not get it out of their minds, that there was something real under them; and that Ixion's wheel, which by a perpetual motion carried him about; and Sisyphus's stone, which he was perpetually rolling up the hill, and when he had got it near the top tumbled down, and still created him a new labour; and Tantalus's continual hunger and thirst, aggravated by a perpetual nearness of enjoyment, and a perpetual disappointment; and Prometheus's being chained to a rock, with an eagle or vulture perpetually preying upon his liver, which grew as fast as it was gnawed: I say, even the wiser among the heathens looked upon these as fantastical representations of something that was real; viz. the grievous and endless punishment of sinners, the not to be endured, and yet perpetually renewed torments of another world; for in the midst of all the ignorance and degeneracy of the heathen world, men's consciences did accuse

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them when they did amiss, and they had secret fears and misgivings of some mighty danger hanging over them from the displeasure of a superior Being, and the apprehension of some great mischiefs likely to follow their wicked actions, which some time or other would overtake them; which, because they did not always in this world, they dreaded them in the next. And this was the foundation of all those superstitions whereby the ancient pagans endeavoured so carefully to appease their offended deities, and to avert the calamities which they feared they would send down upon them. But all this while they had no certain assurance by any clear and express revelation from God to that purpose, but only the jealousies and suspicions of their own minds, naturally consequent upon those notions which men generally had of God, but so obscured and depraved by the lusts and vices of men, and by the gross and false conceptions which they had of God, that they only served to make them superstitious, but were not clear and strong enough to make them wisely and seriously religious. And, to speak the truth, the more knowing and inquisitive part of the heathen world had brought all these things into great doubt and uncertainty, by the nicety and subtlety of disputes about them; so that it was no great wonder that these principles had no greater effect upon the lives of men, when their apprehensions of them were so dark and doubtful.

But the gospel hath made a most clear and certain revelation of these things to mankind. It was written before upon men's hearts as the great sanction of the law of nature; but the impressions of this were in a great measure blurred and worn out, so

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that it had no great power and efficacy upon the minds and manners of men; but now it is clearly discovered to us, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven," which expression may well imply in it these three things:

First, The clearness of the discovery; "the wrath of God" is said to be "revealed."

Secondly, The extraordinary manner of it; it is said to be "revealed from heaven."

Thirdly, The certainty of it; not being the result of subtle and doubtful reasonings, but having a Divine testimony and confirmation given to it, which is the proper meaning of being "revealed from heaven."

First, It imports the clearness of the discovery. The punishment of sinners in another world is not so obscure a matter as it was before: it is now expressly declared in the gospel, together with the particular circumstances of it; namely, that there is another life after this, wherein men shall receive the just recompense of reward for all the actions done by them in this life; that there is a particular time appointed, wherein God will call all the world to a solemn account, and those who are in their graves shall, by a powerful voice, be raised to life, and those who shall then be found alive shall be suddenly changed; when our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, who once came in great humility to save us, shall come again "in power and great glory," attended with "his mighty angels; and all nations shall be gathered before him," and all mankind shall be separated into two companies, the righteous and the wicked, who, after a full hearing and fair trial, shall be sentenced, according to their actions; the one to eternal life

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and happiness, the other to everlasting misery and torment.

So that the gospel hath not only declared the thing to us, that there shall be a future judgment; but for our farther assurance and satisfaction in this matter, and that these things might make a deep impression, and strike a great awe upon our minds, God hath been pleased to reveal it to us with a great many particular circumstances, such as are very worthy of God, and apt to fill the minds of men with dread and astonishment, as often as they think of them.

For the circumstances of this judgment revealed to us in the gospel are very solemn and awful; not such as the wild fancies and imaginations of men would have been apt to have dressed it up withal, such as are the fictions of the heathen poets, and the extravagances of Mahomet; which, though they be terrible enough, yet they are withal ridiculous; but such as are every way becoming the majesty of the great God, and the solemnity of the great day, and such as do not in the least savour of the vanity and lightness of human imagination.

For what more fair and equal, than that men should be tried by a man like themselves, one of the same rank and condition, that had experience of the infirmities and temptations of human nature? So our Lord tells us, that "the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son," because he is the Son of man; and therefore cannot be excepted against, as not being a fit and equal judge. And this St. Paul offers as a clear proof of the equitable proceedings of that day: "God (says he) hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained."

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And then what more congruous than that the Son of God, who had taken so much pains for the salvation of men, and came into the world for that purpose, and had used all imaginable means for the reformation of mankind; I say, what more congruous, than that this very person should be honoured by God to sit in judgment upon the world, and to condemn those who, after all the means that had been tried for their recovery, would not repent and be saved. And, what more proper, than that men, who are to be judged for "things done in the body," should be judged in the body; and consequently that the resurrection of the dead should precede the general judgment.

And what more magnificent and suitable to this glorious solemnity, than the awful circumstances which the Scripture mentions of the appearance of this great Judge; that he shall "descend from heaven," in great majesty and glory, attended with "his mighty angels," and that "every eye shall see him;" that, upon his appearance, the frame of nature shall be in an agony, and the whole world in flame and confusion; that those great and glorious bodies of light shall be obscured, and by degrees extinguished: "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven shaken;" yea, "the heavens themselves shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements dissolve with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." I appeal to any man, whether this be not a representation of things very proper and suitable to that great day, wherein He who made the world shall come to judge it? and whether the wit of man ever devised any thing so awful and so agreeable to the majesty of God, and the solemn judgment of the whole world?

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The description which Virgil makes of the judgment of another world, of the Elysian fields, and the infernal regions, how infinitely do they fall short of the majesty of the Holy Scripture, and the description there made of heaven and hell, and of "the great and terrible day of the Lord!" so that in comparison they are childish and trifling; and yet, perhaps, he had the most regular and most governed imagination of any man that ever lived, and observed the greatest decorum in his characters and descriptions. But who can declare the great things of God, but he to whom God shall reveal them!

Secondly, This expression of "the wrath of God" being "revealed from heaven," doth not only imply the clear discovery of the thing, but likewise something extraordinary in the manner of the discovery. It is not only a natural impression upon the minds of men, that God will severely punish sinners; but he hath taken care that mankind should be instructed in this matter in a very particular and extraordinary manner. He hath not left it to the reason of men to collect it from the consideration of his attributes and perfections, his holiness and justice, and from the consideration of the promiscuous administration of his providence towards good and bad men in this world; but he hath been pleased to send an extraordinary person from heaven, on purpose to declare this thing plainly to the world: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven;" that is, God sent his own Son from heaven, on purpose to declare his wrath against all obstinate and impenitent sinners, that he might effectually awaken the drowsy world to repentance; he hath sent an extraordinary ambassador into the world, to give warning to all those who continue in their sins, of

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the judgment of the great day, and to summon them before his dreadful tribunal. So the apostle tells the Athenians, (Acts xvii. 30, 31.) "Now he commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

Thirdly, This expression implies likewise the certainty of this discovery. If the wrath of God had only been declared in the discourses of wise men, though grounded upon very probable reason, yet it might have been brought into doubt by the contrary reasonings of subtle and disputing men: but, to put the matter out of all question, we have a Divine testimony for it, and God hath confirmed it from heaven, by signs, and wonders, and miracles, especially by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; for "by this he hath given assurance unto all men, that it is he who is ordained of God to judge the quick and dead."

Thus you see in what respect "the wrath of God" is said to be "revealed from heaven;" in that the gospel hath made a more clear, and particular, and certain discovery of the judgment of the great day than ever was made to the world before. I proceed to the

Third observation, which I shall speak but briefly to; namely, That every wicked and vicious practice doth expose men to this dreadful danger. The apostle instanceth in the two chief heads to which the sins of men may be reduced, impiety towards God, and unrighteousness towards men; and therefore he is to be understood to denounce the wrath of God against every particular kind of

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sin, comprehended under these general heads; so that no man that allows himself in any impiety and wickedness of life can hope to escape the wrath of God. Therefore it concerns us to be entirely religious, and to have respect to all God's commandments; and to take heed that we do not allow ourselves in the practice of any kind of sin whatsoever, because the living in any one known sin is enough to expose us to the dreadful wrath of God. Though a man be just and righteous in his dealings with men, yet if he neglect the worship and service of God, this will certainly bring him under condemnation: and, on the other hand, though a man may serve God never so diligently and devoutly, yet if he be defective in righteousness towards men, if he deal falsely and fraudulently with his neighbour, he shall not escape the wrath of God; though a man pretend to never so much piety and devotion, yet if he be unrighteous, "he shall not inherit the kingdom of God;" if any man "overreach and defraud his brother in any matter, the Lord is the avenger of such," saith St. Paul. (1 Thess. iv. 6.)

So that here is a very powerful argument to take men off from all sin, and to engage them to a constant and careful discharge of their whole duty toward God and men, and to reform whatever is amiss either in the frame and temper of their minds, or in the actions and course of their lives; because any kind of wickedness, any one sort of vicious course, lays men open to the vengeance of God, and the punishments of another world; "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men;" there is no exception in the case, we must forsake all sin, subdue every lust, "be holy in all manner of conversation," otherwise

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we can have no reasonable hopes of escaping the wrath of God, and the damnation of hell. But I proceed to the

Fourth observation; namely, That it is a very great aggravation of sin, for men to offend against the light of their own minds. The apostle here aggravates the wickedness of the heathen world, that they did not live up to that knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, "holding the truth of God in unrighteousness." And that he speaks here of the heathen, is plain from his following discourse, and the character he gives of those persons of whom he was speaking, "who hold the truth of God in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewn it unto them;" and this he proves, because those who were destitute of Divine revelation, were not without all knowledge of God, being led by the sight of this visible world, to the knowledge of an invisible Being and power that was the author of it: (ver. 20, 21.) "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead, so that they are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, (*Hæc est summa delicti, nolle agnoscere, quem ignorare non possis*, saith Tertullian to the heathen; 'This is the height of thy fault, not to acknowledge him, whom thou canst not but know, not to own him, of whom thou canst not be ignorant if thou wouldst;') neither were thankful;" they did not pay those acknowledgments to him which of right were due to the author of their being, and of all good things; but became vain in their

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imaginations; ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, *they were fooled with their own reasonings.* This he speaks of the philosophers, who in those great arguments of the being and providence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the rewards of another world, had lost the truth by too much subtilty about it, and had disputed themselves into doubt and uncertainty about those things which were naturally known; for *nimium altercando veritas amittitur*; "Truth is many times lost by too much contention and dispute about it; and, by too eager a pursuit of it, men many times outrun it, and leave it behind;" (ver. 22.) "and professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Men never play the fools more, than by endeavouring to be over-subtle and wise; (ver. 23.) "and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things;" here he speaks of the sottishness of their idolatry, whereby they provoked God to give them up to all manner of lewdness and impurity; (ver. 24.) "wherefore God also gave them up unto uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts;" and again, (ver. 26.) "for this cause God gave them up to vile affections;" and then he enumerates the abominable lusts and vices they were guilty of, notwithstanding their natural acknowledgment of the Divine justice; (ver. 32.) "who, knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." By all which it appears that he speaks of the heathen, who offended against the natural light of their own minds, and therefore were without excuse. *Quam sibi veniam sperare possunt impieta-*

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tis sitæ, qui non agnoscunt cultum ejus, quem prorsus ignorari ab hominibus fas non est? saith Lactantius; "How can they hope for pardon of their impiety, who deny to worship that God, of whom it is not possible mankind should be wholly ignorant?"

So that this is "to hold the truth in unrighteousness," injuriously to suppress it, and to hinder the power and efficacy of it upon their minds and actions; for so the word κατέχειν sometimes signifies, as well as to hold fast; and this every man does, who acts contrary to what he believes and knows; he offers violence to the light of his own mind, and does injury to the truth, and keeps that a prisoner which would set him free; "ye shall know the truth (says our Lord), and the truth shall make you free."

And this is one of the highest aggravations of the sins of men, to offend against knowledge, and that light which God hath set up in every man's mind. If men wander and stumble in the dark, it is not to be wondered at; many times it is unavoidable, and no care can prevent it: but in the light it is expected men should look before them, and discern their way. That natural light which the heathens had, though it was but comparatively dim and imperfect, yet the apostle takes notice of it as a great aggravation of their idolatrous and abominable practices. Those natural notions which all men have of God, if they had in any measure attended to them, and governed themselves by them, might have been sufficient to have preserved them from dishonouring the Deity, by worshipping creatures instead of God; the common light of nature was enough to have discovered to them the evil of those lewd and unnatural practices, which many of them were guilty of;

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but they detained and suppressed the truth most injuriously, and would not suffer it to have its natural and proper influence upon them; and this is that which left them without excuse, that from the light of nature they had knowledge enough to have done better and to have preserved them from those great crimes which were so common among them.

And if this was so great an aggravation of the impiety and wickedness of the heathen, and left them without excuse, what apology can be made for the impiety and unrighteousness of Christians, who have so strong and clear a light to discover to them their duty, and the danger of neglecting it, to whom the "wrath of God" is plainly "revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?" The truths of the gospel are so very clear and powerful, and such an improvement of natural light, that men must use great force and violence to suppress them, and to hinder the efficacy of them upon their lives. And this is a certain rule, by how much the greater our knowledge, by so much the less is our excuse, and so much the greater punishment is due to our faults. So our Lord hath told us, (Luke xii. 47.) "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." And, (John ix. 41.) "If ye were blind (says our Saviour to the Jews) ye should have no sin." So much ignorance as there is of our duty, so much abatement of the wilfulness of our faults; but "if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation," says the apostle to the Hebrews; (chap. x. 26, 27.) "If we sin wilfully after we have

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received the knowledge of the truth;" implying, that men cannot pretend ignorance for their faults, after so clear a revelation of the will of God, as is made to mankind by the gospel.

And upon this consideration it is, that our Saviour doth so aggravate the impenitency and unbelief of the Jews, because it was in opposition to all the advantages of knowledge, which can be imagined to be afforded to mankind. (John xv. 22—24.) "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin;" that is, in comparison their sin had been much more excusable; "but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." How is that? our Saviour means, that they had now sinned against all the advantages of knowing the will of God that mankind could possibly have: at once opposing natural light, which was the dispensation of the Father; and the clearest revelation of God's will, in the dispensation of the gospel by his Son; "now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."

The two remaining observations I shall reserve to another opportunity.

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SERMON CXI.

THE DANGER OF ALL KNOWN SIN, BOTH FROM THE LIGHT OF NATURE AND REVELATION.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them.—ROM. i. 18, 19.

I HAVE handled four of the observations which I raised from these words; and shall now proceed to the other two that remain.

The fifth observation was, That the natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live contrary to it, is a sufficient evidence of their holding the truth of God in unrighteousness. For the reason why the apostle chargeth them with this, is, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest, in that God hath shewed it unto them."

There is a natural knowledge of God, and of the duty we owe to him, which the apostle calls τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, that of God which is obvious to be known by the light of nature, and is as much as is absolutely necessary for us to know. There is something of God that is incomprehensible, and beyond the reach of our understandings; but his being and essential perfections may be known, which he calls his "eternal power and godhead;" these, he tells us, "are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made;" that is, the creation of the world is a plain demonstration to

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men, of the being and power of God; and if so, then God is naturally known to men; the contrary whereof Socinus positively maintains, though therein he be forsaken by most of his followers; an opinion in my judgment very unworthy of one, who, not without reason, was esteemed so great a master of reason; and (though I believe he did not see it) undermining the strongest and surest foundation of all religion, which, when the natural notions of God are once taken away, will certainly want its best support. Besides that, by denying any natural knowledge of God, and his essential perfections, he freely gives away one of the most plausible grounds of opposing the doctrine of the Trinity. But because this is a matter of great consequence, and he was a great man, and is not to be confuted by contempt, but by better reason, if it can be found; I will consider his reasons for this opinion, and return a particular answer to them.

First, He says, that if the knowledge of God were natural, it would not be of faith; but the apostle says, that "we must believe that he is." The force of which argument, if it have any, lies in this, that the object of faith is Divine revelation, and therefore we cannot be said to believe what we naturally know. The schoolmen indeed say so; but the Scripture useth the word faith more largely, for a real persuasion of any thing, whether grounded upon sense, or reason, or Divine revelation. And our Saviour's speech to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed," does sufficiently intimate, that a man may believe what he sees; and if so, what should hinder, but that a man may be said to believe what he naturally knows; that is, be really persuaded that there is a God from natural light?

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Secondly, His next argument is, because the same apostle concludes Enoch to have believed God, because he pleased God, and without faith it is impossible to please him; from whence he says, it is certain that men may be without this belief, which if it be natural they cannot. Indeed, if the apostle had said, that whoever believes a God, must of necessity obey and please him; then the inference had been good, that all men do not naturally believe a God, because it is certain they do not please him: but it is not good the other way, no more than if a man should argue thus—that because whoever acts reasonably must be endowed with reason, therefore men are not naturally endowed with reason. For as men may naturally be endowed with reason, and yet not always make use of it; so men may naturally know and believe a God, and yet not be careful to please him.

His third argument is, That the Scripture says, that there are some that do not believe a God, for which he cites that of David, "the fool hath said in his heart there is no God;" which certainly proves that bad men live so, as if they believed there were no God; nay, it may farther import, that they endeavour as much as they can to stifle and extinguish the belief of a God in their minds, and would gladly persuade themselves there is no God, because it is convenient for them there should be none; and whether David meant so or not, it is very probable that some may arrive to that height of impiety, as for a time at least, and in some moods, to disbelieve a God, and to be very confident of the arguments on that side. But what then? Is the knowledge and belief of a God therefore not natural to mankind? Nature itself, as constant and uni-

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form as it is, admits of some irregularities and exceptions, in effects that are merely natural, much more in those which have something in them that is voluntary, and depends upon the good or bad use of our reason and understanding; and there is no arguing from what is monstrous, against what is natural. It is natural for men to have five fingers upon a hand, and yet some are born otherwise: but in voluntary agents, that which is natural may be perverted, and in a great measure extinguished in some particular instances; so that there is no force at all in this objection.

His fourth and last argument is, That there have not only been particular persons, but whole nations, who have had no sense, nor so much as suspicion of a Deity. This I confess were of great force, if it were true; and for the proof of this, he produceth the instance of Brasil in America. But I utterly deny the matter of fact and history, and challenge any man to bring good testimony, not only of any nation, but of any city in the world, that ever were professed Atheists.

I know this was affirmed of some part of Brasil, by some of the first discoverers; who yet at the same time owned, that these very people did most expressly believe the immortality of the soul, and the rewards and punishments of another life; opinions which no man can well reconcile with the denial and disbelief of a Deity. But, to put an end to this argument, later and more perfect discoveries have found this not to be true, and do assure us, upon better acquaintance with those barbarous people, that they are deeply possessed with the belief of "one supreme God, who made and governs the world."

Having thus given a particular answer to Soci-

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nus's arguments against the natural knowledge of a God, I will now briefly offer some arguments for it. And to prove that the knowledge and belief of a God is natural to mankind, my

First argument shall be from the universal consent, in this matter, of all nations in all ages. And this is an argument of great force; there being no better way to prove any thing to be natural to any kind of being, than if it be generally found in the whole kind. *Omnium consensus naturæ vox est*, "the consent of all is the voice of nature," saith Tully. And, indeed, by what other argument can we prove that reason, and speech, and an inclination to society, are natural to men; but that these belong to the whole kind?

Secondly, Unless the knowledge of God and his essential perfections be natural, I do not see what sufficient and certain foundation there can be of revealed religion. For unless we naturally know God to be a being of all perfection, and consequently that whatever he says is true, I cannot see what Divine revelation can signify. For God's revealing or declaring such a thing to us, is no necessary argument that it is so, unless antecedently to this revelation we be possessed firmly with this principle—that whatever God says is true. And whatever is known antecedently to revelation, must be known by natural light, and by reasonings and deductions from natural principles. I might farther add to this argument, that the only standard and measure to judge of Divine revelations, and to distinguish between what are true and what are counterfeit, are the natural notions which men have of God, and of his essential perfections.

Thirdly, If the notion of a God be not natural, I

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do not see how men can have any natural notion of the difference of moral good and evil, just and unjust. For if I do not naturally know there is a God, how can I naturally know that there is any law obliging to the one, and forbidding the other? All law and obligation to obedience necessarily supposing the authority of a superior Being. But the apostle expressly asserts, that the gentiles, who were destitute of a revealed law, "were a law unto themselves;" but there cannot be a natural law obliging mankind, unless God be naturally known to them.

And this, Socinus himself, in his discourse upon this very argument, is forced to acknowledge. "In all men (says he) there is naturally a difference of just and unjust, or, at least, there is planted in all men an acknowledgment that just ought to be preferred before unjust, and that which is honest, before the contrary; and this is nothing else but the word of God within a man, which whosoever obeys, in so doing obeys God, though otherwise he neither know nor think there is a God; and there is no doubt but he that thus obeys God is accepted of him." So that here is an acknowledgment of a natural obligation to a law, without any natural knowledge of a superior authority; which I think cannot be; and which is worse, that a man may obey God acceptably, without knowing and believing there is a God; which directly thwarts the ground of his first argument, from those words of the apostle,—"without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God," that is, he that will be religious and please God, "must believe that he is:" so hard is it for any man to contradict nature, without contradicting himself.

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Fourthly, My last argument I ground upon the words of the apostle in my text, "that which may be known of God, is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them." "Is manifest in them," ἐν αὐτοῖς, among them. God hath sufficiently manifested it to mankind. And which way hath God done this? by revelation, or by the natural light of reason? He tells us at the 20th verse: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen;" that is, God, who in himself is invisible, ever since he hath created the world, hath given a visible demonstration of himself, that is, of "his eternal power and godhead; being understood by the things which are made." The plain sense of the whole is, that this wise and wonderful frame of the world, which cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other cause but God, is a sensible demonstration, to all mankind, of an eternal and powerful Being that was the author and framer of it. The only question now is, whether this text speaks of the knowledge of God by particular revelation, or by natural light and reason, from the contemplation of the works of God: Socinus having no other way to avoid the force of this text, will needs understand it of the knowledge of God by the revelation of the gospel. His words are these: "The apostle therefore says, in this place, that the eternal godhead of God, that is, that which God would always have us to do (for the godhead is sometimes taken in this sense), and his eternal power, that is, his promise which never fails (in which sense he said a little before that the gospel is the power of God), these, I say, which were never seen by men; that is, were never known to them since the creation of the world, are known by

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his works; that is, by the wonderful operation of God, and Divine men, especially of Christ and his apostles." These are his very words; and now I refer it to any indifferent judgment, whether this be not a very forced and constrained interpretation of this text; and whether that which I have before given, be not infinitely more free and natural, and every way more agreeable to the obvious sense of the words, and the scope of the apostle's argument. For he plainly speaks of the heathen, and proves them to be inexcusable, because "they held the truth in unrighteousness;" and having a natural knowledge of God, from the contemplation of his works, and the things which are made, "they did not glorify him as God." And therefore I shall not trouble myself to give any other answer to it; for, by the absurd violence of it in every part, it confutes itself more effectually than any discourse about it can do.

I have been the larger upon this, because it is a matter of so great consequence, and lies at the bottom of all religion. For the natural knowledge which men have of God is, when all is done, the surest and fastest hold that religion hath on human nature. Besides, how should God judge that part of the world who are wholly destitute of Divine revelation, if they had no natural knowledge of him, and consequently could not be under the direction and government of any law? For "where there is no law, there is no transgression;" and where men are guilty of the breach of no law, they cannot be judged and condemned for it; for "the judgment of God is according to truth."

And now this being established, that men have a natural knowledge of God; if they contradict it by

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their life and practice, they are guilty of "retaining the truth of God in unrighteousness." For by this argument the apostle proves the heathen to be guilty of "holding the truth in unrighteousness;" because, notwithstanding the natural knowledge which they had of God "by the things which are made," they lived in the practice of gross idolatry, and the most abominable sins and vices.

And this concerns us much more, who have the glorious light of the gospel added to the light of nature. For if they who offended against the light of nature, were liable to the judgment of God, of how much sorer punishment shall we be thought worthy, if we neglect those infinite advantages which the revelation of the gospel hath superadded to natural light? He hath now set our duty in the clearest and strongest light that ever was afforded to mankind, so that if we will not now believe and repent, there is no remedy for us, but we must "die in our sins; if we sin wilfully, after" so much "knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume us."

The sum of what hath been said on this argument is briefly this; that men have a natural knowledge of God, and of those great duties which result from the knowledge of him; so that whatever men say and pretend, as to the main things of religion, the worship of God, and justice and righteousness towards men, setting aside Divine revelation, we are all naturally convinced of our duty, and of what we ought to do; and those who live in a bad course, need only be put in mind of what they naturally know, better than any body else can tell them, that they are in a bad course; so that I may appeal to

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all wicked men, from themselves, rash, and heated, and intoxicated with pleasure and vanity, transported and hurried away by lust and passion; to themselves, serious and composed, and in a cool and considerate temper. And can any sober man forbear to follow the convictions of his own mind, and to resolve to do what he inwardly consents to as best? Let us but be true to ourselves, and obey the dictates of our own minds, and give leave to our own consciences to counsel us, and tell us what we ought to do, and we shall be "a law to ourselves." I proceed to the

Sixth and last observation; namely, That the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the gospel, against the impiety and unrighteousness of men, is one principal thing, which renders it so very powerful and likely a means for the salvation of mankind. For the apostle instanceth in two things, which give the gospel so great an advantage to this purpose, the mercy of God to penitent sinners, and his severity toward the impenitent; both which are so fully and clearly revealed in the gospel. "The gospel is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth, because therein the righteousness of God is revealed;" that is, his great grace and mercy in the justification and pardon of sinners by Jesus Christ, which I have already shewn to be meant by "the righteousness of God," by comparing this with the explication which is given of "the righteousness of God," (chap. iii. ver. 22.)

The other reason which he gives of the gospel's being "the power of God to salvation," is the plain declaration of the severity of God toward impenitent sinners; "because therein," also, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungod-

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liness and unrighteousness of men." The force of which argument will appear, if we consider these following particulars:

First, That the declarations of the gospel in this matter are so plain and express.

Secondly, That they are very dreadful and terrible.

Thirdly, That there is no safety or hope of impunity for men that go on and continue in their sins.

Fourthly, That this argument will take hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retain its force upon the minds of men, when all other considerations fail, and are of little or no efficacy. And,

Fifthly, That no religion in the world can urge this argument with that force and advantage that Christianity does.

First, That the declarations of the gospel in this matter are most plain and express; and that not only against sin and wickedness in general, but against particular sins and vices; so that no man that lives in any evil and vicious course, can be ignorant of his danger. Our Lord hath told us in general, what shall be the doom of the workers of iniquity, yea, though they may have owned him, and made profession of his name: (Matt. vii. 21.) "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, &c. then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity." (Matt. xiii. 49, 50.) "So shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked

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from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. xxv. 46.) "The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." (John v. 28, 29.) "The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Rom. ii. 6, St. Paul tells us that there is "a day of wrath, and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9, that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Nothing can be more plain and express than these general declarations of the wrath of God against sinners; that there is a day of judgment appointed, and a judge constituted to take cognizance of the actions of men, to pass a severe sentence, and to inflict a terrible punishment, upon the workers of iniquity.

More particularly our Lord and his apostles have denounced the wrath of God against particular sins and vices. In several places of the New Testament, there are catalogues given of particular sins; the practice whereof will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of heaven, and expose them to the wrath

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and vengeance of God. (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.) "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." So likewise, (Gal. v. 19—21.) "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Col. iii. 5, 6.) "Mortify therefore your members upon earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." (Rev. xxi. 8.) "The fearful and unbelieving, (that is, those who rejected the Christian religion, notwithstanding the clear evidence that was offered for it, and those who out of fear should apostatize from it;) the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, (that is, those who were guilty of unnatural lusts, not fit to be named) and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars (that is, all sorts of false and deceitful and perfidious persons), shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

And not only these gross and notorious sins, which are such plain violations of the law and light of nature; but those wherein mankind have been apt to take more liberty, as if they were not

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sufficiently convinced of the evil of them; as, the resisting of civil authority, which the apostle tells us, they that are guilty of "shall receive to themselves damnation:" (Rom. xiii. 2.) profane swearing in common conversation, which, St. James tells us, brings men under the danger of damnation, (chap. v. 12.) "Above all things, my brethren, swear not, lest ye fall under condemnation." Nay, our Saviour hath told us plainly, that not only for wicked actions, but for every evil and sinful word, men are obnoxious to the judgment of God. So our Lord assures us; (Matt. xii. 36, 37.) "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." He had spoken before of that great and unpardonable sin of blaspheming the Holy Ghost; and because this might be thought great severity for evil words, he declares the reason more fully, because words shew the mind and temper of the man: (ver. 34.) "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." "The character of the man is shewn by his words," saith Menander. *Profert enim mores plerumque oratio* (saith Quintilian) *et animi secreta detegit*; "A man's speech discovers his manners, and the secrets of his heart;" *ut vivit etiam quemque dicere*, "Men commonly speak as they live;" and therefore our Saviour adds, "A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth evil things: but I say unto you, that every idle word," πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν, by which I do not think our Saviour means, that men should be called to a solemn account at the day of judg-

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ment, for every trifling, and impertinent, and unprofitable word, but every wicked and sinful word of any kind: as if he had said, Do you think this severe, to make words an unpardonable fault? I say unto you, that men shall not only be condemned for their malicious and blasphemous speeches against the Holy Ghost; but they shall likewise give a strict account for all other wicked and sinful speeches in any kind, though much inferior to this. And this is not only most agreeable to the scope of our Saviour, but is confirmed by some Greek copies, in which it is πᾶν ῥῆμα πονηρὸν, "every wicked word which men shall speak, they shall be accountable for it at the day of judgment." But this by the by.

Our Saviour likewise tells us, that men shall not only be proceeded against for sins of commission, but for the bare omission and neglect of their duty, especially in works of mercy and charity; for not feeding the hungry, and the like, as we see, Matt. xxv. and that for the omission of these, he will pass that terrible sentence, "Depart ye cursed," &c. So that it nearly concerns us to be careful of our whole life, of all our words and actions, since the gospel hath so plainly and expressly declared, that "for all these things God will bring us into judgment." And if the threatenings of the gospel be true, "what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?"

Secondly, As the threatenings of the gospel are very plain and express, so are they likewise very dreadful and terrible. I want words to express the least part of the terror of them; and yet the expressions of Scripture concerning the misery and punishment of sinners in another world, are such as

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may raise amazement and horror in those that hear them. Sometimes it is expressed by a departing from God, and a perpetual banishment from his presence, who is the fountain of all comfort, and joy, and happiness; sometimes by the loss of our souls, or ourselves. "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" or, (as it is in another evangelist) "to lose himself?" Not that our being shall be destroyed; that would be a happy loss indeed, to him that is sentenced to be for ever miserable; but the man shall still remain, and his body and soul continue to be the foundation of his misery, and a scene of perpetual woe and discontent, which our Saviour calls "the destroying of body and soul in hell," or going into everlasting punishment, "where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched." Could I represent to you the horror of that dismal prison, into which wicked and impure souls are to be thrust, and the misery they must there endure, without the least spark of comfort, or glimmering of hope; how they wail and groan under the intolerable wrath of God, the insolent scorn and cruelty of devils, the severe lashes and stings, raging anguish and horrible despair, of their own minds, without intermission, without pity, without hope of ever seeing an end of that misery, which yet is insupportable for one moment; could I represent these things to you according to the terror of them, what effect must they have upon us? and with what patience could any man bear to think of plunging himself into this misery? and by his own wilful fault and folly to endanger his coming into this place and state of torments? especially, if we consider, in the

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Third place, That the gospel hath likewise declared, that there is no avoiding of this misery, no hopes of impunity, if men go on and continue in their sins. The terms of the gospel in this are peremptory, that "except we repent, we shall perish;" that "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord;" that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." And this is a very pressing consideration, and brings the matter to a short and plain issue. Either we must leave our sins, or die in them; either we must repent of them, or be judged for them; either we must forsake our sins, and break off that wicked course which we have lived in, or we must quit all hopes of heaven and happiness; nay, we cannot escape the damnation of hell. The clear revelation of a future judgment is so pressing an argument to repentance, as no man can in reason resist, that hath not a mind to be miserable. "Now (saith St. Paul to the Athenians) he straightly chargeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness."

Men may cheat themselves, or suffer themselves to be deluded by others, about several means and devices of reconciling a wicked life, with the hopes of heaven and eternal salvation; as, by mingling some pangs of sorrow for sin, and some hot fits of devotion, with a sinful life; which is only the interruption of a wicked course, without reformation and amendment of life: but "let no man deceive you with vain words;" for our blessed Saviour hath provided no other ways to save men, but upon the terms of repentance and obedience.

Fourthly, This argument takes hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retains its

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force upon the minds of men, when almost all other considerations fail, and have lost their efficacy upon us. Many men are gone so far in an evil course, that neither shame of their vices, nor the love of God and virtue, nor the hopes of heaven, are of any force with them, to reclaim them and bring them to a better mind: but there is one handle yet left, whereby to lay hold of them, and that is their fear. This is a passion that lies deep in our nature, being founded in self-preservation, and sticks so close to us, that we cannot quit ourselves of it, nor shake it off. Men may put off ingenuity, and break through all obligations of gratitude. Men may harden their foreheads, and conquer all sense of shame; but they can never perfectly stifle and subdue their fears; they can hardly so extinguish the fear of hell, but that some sparks of that fire will ever and anon be flying about in their consciences, especially when they are made sober, and brought to themselves by affliction, and by the present apprehensions of death have a nearer sight of another world. And if it was so hard for the heathen to conquer these apprehensions, how much harder must it be to Christians, who have so much greater assurance of these things, and to whom the wrath of God is so clearly revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?

Fifthly, No religion in the world ever urged this argument upon men, with that force and advantage which Christianity does. The philosophy of the heathen gave men no steady assurance of the thing; the most knowing persons among them were not agreed about a future state; the greatest part of them spake but doubtfully concerning another life. And, besides the natural jealousies and suspicions of

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mankind concerning these things, they had only some fair probabilities of reason, and the authority of their poets, who talked they knew not what about the Elysian fields, and the infernal regions, and the three judges of hell; so that the wisest among them had hardly assurance enough in themselves of the truth of the thing to press it upon others with any great confidence, and therefore it was not likely to have any great efficacy upon the generality of mankind.

As for the Jewish religion; though that supposed and took for granted the rewards of another world, as a principle of natural religion; yet in the law of Moses there was no particular and express revelation of the life of the world to come; and what was deduced from it, was by remote and obscure consequence. Temporal promises and threatenings it had many and clear; and their eyes were so dazzled with these, that it is probable that the generality of them did but little consider a future state, till they fell into great temporal calamities under the Grecian and Roman empires, whereby they were almost necessarily awakened to the consideration and hopes of a better life, to relieve them under their present evils and sufferings; and yet even in that time they were divided into two great factions about this matter, the one affirming, and the other as confidently denying, any life after this. But the gospel hath brought life and immortality to light; and we are assured from heaven of the truth and reality of another state, and a future judgment. The Son of God was sent into the world to preach this doctrine, and rose again from the dead, and was taken up into heaven, for a visible demonstration to all mankind of another life after this; and consequently of a future judg-

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ment, which no man ever doubted of, that did firmly believe a future state.

The sum of all that I have said is this; the gospel hath plainly declared to us, that the only way to salvation is by forsaking our sins, and living a holy and virtuous life; and the most effectual argument in the world to persuade men to this, is the consideration of the infinite danger that a sinful course exposeth men to, since the wrath of God continually hangs over sinners, and, if they continue in their sins, will certainly fall upon them, and overwhelm them with misery; and he that is not moved by this argument, is lost to all intents and purposes.

All that now remains is, to urge this argument upon men, and from the serious consideration of it, to persuade them to repent, and reform their wicked lives. And was there ever an age wherein this was more needful? when iniquity doth not only abound, but even rage among us; when infidelity and profaneness, and all manner of lewdness and vice, appears so boldly and openly, and men commit the greatest abominations without blushing at them; when vice hath got such head that it can hardly bear to be checked and controlled, and when, as the Roman historian complains of his times, *ad ea tempora, quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus, perventum est;* "things are come to that pass, that we can neither bear our vices nor the remedies of them?" Our vices are grown to a prodigious and intolerable height, and yet men hardly have the patience to hear of them; and surely a disease is then dangerous indeed, when it cannot bear the severity that is necessary to a cure. But yet, notwithstanding this, we who are the messengers of God to men, to warn them of their sin and danger, must not keep

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silence, and spare to tell them, both of their sins, and of the judgment of God which hangs over them; that God will "visit for these things," and that his soul will be avenged on such a nation as this. At least we may have leave to warn others, who are not yet run to the same excess of riot, to save themselves from this untoward generation. God's judgments are abroad in the earth, and call aloud upon us, to learn righteousness.

But this is but a small consideration, in comparison of the judgment of another world, which we, who call ourselves Christians, do profess to believe, as one of the chief articles of our faith. The consideration of this should check and cool us in the heat of all our sinful pleasures; and that bitter irony of Solomon should cut us to the heart, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Think often and seriously on that time, wherein the wrath of God, which is now revealed against sin, shall be executed upon sinners; and if we believe this, we are strangely stupid and obstinate if we be not moved by it. The assurance of this made St. Paul extremely importunate in exhorting men to avoid so great danger; (2 Cor. v. 10, 11.) "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or evil. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men." And if this ought to move us to take so great a care of others, much more of ourselves. The judgment to come is a very amazing consideration; it is a fearful thing to hear

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of it, but it will be much more terrible to see it, especially to those whose guilt must needs make them so heartily concerned in the dismal consequences of it; and yet, as sure as I stand and you sit here, this great and terrible day of the Lord will come, and who may abide his coming? what will we do, when that day shall surprise us careless and unprepared? what unspeakable horror and amazement will then take hold of us! when, lifting up our eyes to heaven, we shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of it, with power and great glory; when that powerful voice, which shall pierce the ears of the dead, shall ring through the world, "Arise ye dead, and come to judgment;" when the mighty trumpet shall sound, and wake the sleepers of a thousand years, and summon the dispersed parts of the bodies of all men that ever lived, to rally together and take their place; and the souls and bodies of men, which have been so long strangers to one another, shall meet and be united again, to receive the doom due to their deeds; what fear shall then surprise sinners, and how will they tremble at the presence of the great Judge, and for the glory of his Majesty! how will their consciences fly in their faces, and their own hearts condemn them, for their wicked and ungodly lives, and even prevent that sentence which yet shall certainly be passed and executed upon them! But I will proceed no farther in this argument, which hath so much of terror in it.

I will conclude my sermon, as Solomon doth his Ecclesiastes: (chap. xii. 13, 14.) "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man; for God shall bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it

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be evil." To which I will only add that serious and merciful admonition of a greater than Solomon; I mean the great Judge of the whole world, our blessed Lord and Saviour: (Luke xxi. 34—36.) "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you at unawares. For as a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, &c.

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SERMON CXII.

KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE NECESSARY IN RELIGION.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.—JOHN xiii. 17.

Two things make up religion, the knowledge and the practice of it; and the first is wholly in order to the second; and God hath not revealed to us the knowledge of himself and his will, merely for the improvement of our understanding, but for the bettering of our hearts and lives: not to entertain our minds with the speculations of religion and virtue, but to form and govern our actions. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

In which words our blessed Saviour does, from a particular instance, take occasion to settle a general conclusion; namely, that religion doth mainly consist in practice, and that the knowledge of his doctrine, without the real effects of it upon our lives, will bring no man to heaven. In the beginning of this chapter, our great Lord and Master, to testify his love to his disciples, and to give them a lively instance and example of that great virtue of humility, is pleased to condescend to a very low and mean office, such as was used to be performed by servants to their masters, and not by the master to his servants; namely, to wash their feet: and when he had done this, he asks them if they did understand the meaning of this strange action. "Know ye what I have done unto you? ye call me Master, and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then,

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your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than the Lord, neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him; if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." As if he had said, This which I have now done, is easy to be understood; and so likewise are all those other Christian graces and virtues, which I have heretofore, by my doctrine and example, recommended to you; but it is not enough to know these things, but ye must likewise do them. The end and the life of all our knowledge in religion is to put in practice what we know. It is necessary, indeed, that we should know our duty, but knowledge alone will never bring us to that happiness which religion designs to make us partakers of, if our knowledge have not its due and proper influence upon our lives. Nay, so far will our knowledge be from making us happy, if it be separated from the virtues of a good life, that it will prove one of the heaviest aggravations of our misery; and it is as if he had said, " If ye know these things, woe be unto you, if ye do them not."

From these words, then, I shall observe these three things, which I shall speak but briefly to.

First, That the knowledge of God's will, and our duty, is necessary to the practice of it; " If ye know these things," which supposeth, that we must know our duty, before we can do it.

Secondly, That the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may be, and too often are, separated. This likewise the text supposeth, that men may know their duty, and yet not do it; and that

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this is very frequent, which is the reason why our Saviour gives this caution.

Thirdly, That the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness; "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." I begin with the

First of these; namely, That the knowledge of God's will and our duty is necessary, in order to the practice of it. The truth of this proposition is so clear and evident, at first view, that nothing can obscure it, and bring it in question, but to endeavour to prove it; and therefore, instead of spending time in that, I shall take occasion from it justly to reprove that preposterous course which is taken, and openly avowed and justified by some, as the safest and best way to make men religious, and to bring them to happiness; namely, by taking away from them the means of knowledge; as if the best way to bring men to do the will of God, were to keep men from knowing it. For what else can be the meaning of that maxim so current in the church of Rome, that "ignorance is the mother of devotion?" or of that strange and injurious practice of theirs of locking up from the people that great storehouse and treasury of Divine knowledge, the Holy Scriptures, in an unknown tongue?

I know very well, that, in justification of this hard usage of their people, it is pretended that knowledge is apt to puff men up, to make them proud and contentious, refractory and disobedient, and heretical, and what not; and, particularly, that the free and familiar use of the Holy Scriptures permitted to the people, hath ministered occasion to the people of falling into great and dangerous errors, and of making great disturbance and divisions among Christ-

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ians. For answer to this pretence, I desire these four or five things may be considered.

First, That unless this be the natural and necessary effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free use of the Holy Scriptures, there is no force in this reason; and if this be the proper and natural effect of this knowledge, then this reason will reach a great way farther, than those who make use of it are willing it should.

Secondly, That this is not the natural and necessary effect of knowledge in religion, but only accidental, and proceeding from men's abuse of it; for which the thing itself is not to be taken away.

Thirdly, That the proper and natural effects and consequences of ignorance, are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than those which are accidentally occasioned by knowledge.

Fourthly, That if this reason be good, it is much stronger for withholding the Scriptures from the priests and the learned, than from the people.

Fifthly, That this danger was as great, and as well known in the apostles' times, and yet they took a quite contrary course.

First, I desire it may be considered, that, unless this be the natural and necessary effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free use of the Holy Scriptures, there is no force in this reason, for that which is necessary, or highly useful, ought not to be taken away, because it is liable to be perverted, and abused to ill purposes. If it ought, then not only knowledge in religion, but all other knowledge ought to be restrained and suppressed; for all knowledge is apt to puff up, and liable to be abused to many ill purposes. At this rate, light, and liberty, and reason, yea, and life itself, ought all to

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be taken away, because they are all greatly abused, by many men, to some ill purposes or other; so that unless these ill effects do naturally and necessarily spring from knowledge in religion, the objection from them is of no force; and if they do necessarily flow from it, then this reason will reach a great way farther than those that make use of it are willing it should; for if this be true, that the knowledge of religion, as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, is of its own nature so pernicious, as to make men proud, and contentious, and heretical, and disobedient to authority; then the blame of all this would fall upon our blessed Saviour, for revealing so pernicious a doctrine, and upon his apostles for publishing this doctrine in a known tongue to all mankind, and thereby laying the foundation of perpetual schisms and heresies in the church.

Secondly, But this is not the natural and necessary effect of knowledge in religion, but only accidental, and proceeding from men's abuse of it, for which the thing itself ought not to be taken away. And thus much certainly they will grant, because it cannot with any face be denied; and if so, then the means of knowledge are not to be denied, but only men are to be cautioned not to pervert and abuse them. And if any man abuse the Holy Scriptures to the patronizing of error or heresy, or to any other bad purpose, he does it at his peril, and must give an account to God for it, but ought not to be deprived of the means of knowledge, for fear he should make an ill use of them. We must not hinder men from being Christians, to preserve them from being heretics, and put out men's eyes, for fear they should some time or other take upon them to dispute their way with their guides.

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I remember that St. Paul, (1 Cor. viii. 1.) takes notice of this accidental inconvenience of knowledge, that it puffeth up; and that this pride occasioned great contentions and divisions among them: but the remedy which he prescribes against this mischief of knowledge, is not to withhold from men the means of it, and to celebrate the service of God, the prayers of the church, and the reading of the Scriptures in an unknown tongue, but, quite contrary (chap. xiv. of that Epistle), he strictly enjoins that the service of God in the church be so performed as may be for the edification of the people; which, he says, cannot be, if it be celebrated in an unknown tongue; and the remedy he prescribes against the accidental mischief and inconvenience of knowledge is not ignorance, but charity, to govern their knowledge, and to help them to make right use of it; (ver. 20. of that chapter,) after he had declared that the service of God ought to be performed in a known tongue, he immediately adds, "Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men." He commends knowledge, he encourageth it, he requires it of all Christians; so far is he from checking the pursuit of it, and depriving the people of the means of it. And indeed there is nothing in the Christian religion, but what is fit for every man to know, because there is nothing in it, but what is designed to promote holiness and a good life; and if men make any other use of their knowledge it is their own fault, for it certainly tends to make men good; and being so useful and necessary to so good a purpose, men ought not to be debarred of it.

Thirdly, Let it be considered, that the proper

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and natural effects and consequences of ignorance are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than those which are accidentally occasioned by knowledge; for so far as a man is ignorant of his duty, it is impossible he should do it. He that hath the knowledge of religion, may be a bad Christian; but he that is destitute of it, can be none at all. Or if ignorance do beget and promote some kind of devotion in men, it is such a devotion as is not properly religion, but superstition; the ignorant man may be zealously superstitious, but without some measure of knowledge no man can be truly religious. "That the soul be without knowledge it is not good," says Solomon, (Prov. xix. 2.) because good practices depend upon our knowledge, and must be directed by it; whereas, a man that is trained up only to the outward performance of some things in religion, as to the saying over so many prayers in an unknown tongue, this man cannot be truly religious; because nothing is religious that is not a reasonable service, and no service can be reasonable that is not directed by our understanding. Indeed, if the end of prayer were only to give God to understand what we want, it were all one what language we prayed in, and whether we understood what we asked of him or not; but so long as the end of prayer is to testify the sense of our own wants, and of our dependance upon God for the supply of them, it is impossible that any man should, in any tolerable propriety of speech, be said to pray, who does not understand what he asks; and the saying over so many paternosters by one that does not understand the meaning of them, is no more a prayer, than the repeating over so many verses in Virgil. And if this were good

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reasoning, that men must not be permitted to know so much as they can in religion, for fear they should grow troublesome with their knowledge, then certainly the best way in the world to maintain peace in the Christian church, would be to let the people know nothing at all in religion; and the best way to secure the ignorance of the people would be to keep the priests as ignorant as the people, and then, to be sure, they could teach them nothing; but then the mischief would be, that, out of a fondness to maintain peace in the Christian church, there would be no church, nor no Christianity; which would be the same wise contrivance, as if a prince should destroy his subjects to keep his kingdom quiet.

Fourthly, Let us likewise consider, that if this reason be good, it is much stronger for withholding the Scriptures from the priests and the learned, than from the people; because the danger of starting errors and heresies, and countenancing them from Scripture, and managing them plausibly and with advantage, is much more to be feared from the learned than from the common people; and the experience of all ages hath shewn, that the great broachers and abetters of heresy in the Christian church, have been men of learning and wit; and most of the famous heresies, that are recorded in ecclesiastical history, have their names from some learned man or other; so that it is a great mistake to think that the way to prevent error and heresy in the church, is to take the Bible out of the hands of the people, so long as the free use of it is permitted to men of learning and skill, in whose hands the danger of perverting it is much greater. The ancient fathers, I am sure, do frequently prescribe to the

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people the constant and careful reading of the Holy Scriptures, as the surest antidote against the poison of dangerous errors, and damnable heresies; and if there be so much danger of seduction into error from the oracles of truth, by what other or better means can we hope to be secured against this danger? if the word of God be so cross and improper a means to this end, one would think that the teachings of men should be much less effectual; so that men must either be left in their ignorance, or they must be permitted to learn from the word of truth; and whatever force this reason of the danger of heresy hath in it, to deprive the common people of the use of the Scriptures, I am sure it is much stronger to wrest them out of the hands of the priests and the learned, because they are much more capable of perverting them to so bad a purpose.

Fifthly, and lastly, This danger was as great and visible in the age of the apostles, as it is now; and yet they took a quite contrary course: there were heresies then as well as now, and either the Scriptures were not thought, by being in the hands of the people, to be the cause of them, or they did not think the taking of them out of their hands a proper remedy. The apostles, in all their epistles, do earnestly exhort the people to grow in knowledge, and commend them for searching the Scriptures, and charge them that the word of God should dwell richly in them. And St. Peter takes particular notice of some men wresting some difficult passages in St. Paul's epistles, as likewise in the other Scriptures, to their own destruction, (2 Pet. iii. 16.) where, speaking of St. Paul's epistles, he says, "there are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also

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the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." Here the danger objected is taken notice of; but the remedy prescribed by St. Peter, is not to take from the people the use of the Scriptures, and to keep them in ignorance; but, after he had cautioned against the like weakness and errors, he exhorts them to grow in knowledge; (ver. 17, 18.) "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before (that is, seeing ye are so plainly told and warned of this danger), beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;" (that is, of the Christian religion;) believing, it seems, that the more knowledge they had in religion, the less they would be in danger of falling into damnable errors. I proceed to the

Second observation; viz. That the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may and often are separated. This likewise is supposed in the text; that men may, and often do, know the will of God, and their duty, and yet fail in the practice of it. Our Saviour, elsewhere, supposeth that many know their Master's will, who do not do it; and he compares those that hear his sayings, and do them not, to a foolish man that built his house upon the sand. And St. James speaks of some, who are "hearers of the word only, but not doers of it;" and for that reason fall short of happiness. And this is no wonder, because the attaining to that knowledge of religion which is necessary to salvation is no difficult task. A great part of it is written in our hearts, and we cannot be ignorant of it if we would; as, that there is a God, and a Providence, and another state after this life, wherein we shall be

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rewarded or punished, according as we have lived here in this world; that God is to be worshipped, to be prayed to for what we want, and to be praised for what we enjoy. Thus far nature instructs men in religion, and in the great duties of morality, as justice and temperance, and the like. And as for revealed religion, as, that Jesus Christ the Son of God came in our nature to save us, by revealing our duty more clearly and fully to us, by giving us a more perfect example of holiness and obedience in his own life and conversation, and by dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification; these are things which men may easily understand; and yet, for all that, they are with difficulty brought to the practice of religion.

I shall instance in three sorts of persons, in whom the knowledge of religion is more remarkably separated from the practice of it; and, for distinction's sake, I may call them by these names—the speculative, the formal, and the hypocritical Christian. The first of these makes religion only a science; the second takes it up for a fashion; the third makes some worldly advantage of it, and serves some secular interest and design by it. All these are, upon several accounts, concerned to understand something of religion; but yet will not be brought to the practice of it.

The first of these, whom I call the speculative Christian, is he who makes religion only a science, and studies it as a piece of learning, and part of that general knowledge in which he affects the reputation of being a master; he hath no design to practise it, but he is loath to be ignorant of it, because the knowledge of it is a good ornament of conversation, and will serve for discourse and entertainment among

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those who are disposed to be grave and serious; and because he does not intend to practise it, he passeth over those things which are plain and easy to be understood, and applies himself chiefly to the consideration of those things which are more abstruse, and will afford matter of controversy and subtle dispute; as the doctrine of the trinity, predestination, free-will, and the like. Of this temper seem many of the schoolmen of old to have been, who made it their great study and business to puzzle religion, and to make every thing in it intricate, by starting infinite questions and difficulties about the plainest truths; and of the same rank usually are the heads and leaders of parties and factions in religion, who, by needless controversies, and endless disputes about something or other, commonly of no great moment in religion, hinder themselves and others from minding the practice of the great and substantial duties of a good life.

Secondly, There is the formal Christian, who takes up religion for a fashion. He is born and bred in a nation where Christianity is professed and countenanced, and therefore thinks it convenient for him to know something of it. Of this sort there are, I fear, a great many, who read the Scriptures sometimes as others do, to know the history of it; and go to church, and hear the gospel preached, and by this means come, in some measure, to understand the history of our Saviour, and the Christian doctrine; but do not at all bend themselves to comply with the great end and design of it: they do not heartily endeavour to form and fashion their lives according to the laws and precepts of it; they think they are very good Christians, if they can give an account of the articles of their faith, profess their be-

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lief in God and Christ, and declare that they hope to be saved by him, though they take no care to keep his commandments. These are they of whom our Saviour speaks, (Luke vi. 46.) who call him, "Lord, Lord; but do not the things which he said."

Thirdly, Hypocritical Christians, who make an interest of religion, and serve some worldly design by it. These are concerned to understand religion more than ordinary, that they may counterfeit it handsomely, and may not be at a loss when they have occasion to put on the garb of it. And this is one part of the character which the apostle gives of those persons, who he foretels would appear in the last days: (2 Tim. iii. 2.) he says they should be "lovers of their own selves, covetous, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it."

Now these men do not love religion, but they have occasion to make use of it, and therefore they will have no more of it than will just serve their purpose and design. And, indeed, he that hath any other design in religion than to please God, and save his soul, needs no more than so much knowledge of it, as will serve him to act a part in it upon occasion. I come to the

Third and last observation; viz. That the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness; "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them;" not "if you know these things happy are ye;" but "if ye know and do them." Now to convince men of so important a truth, I shall endeavour to make out these two things:

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First, That the gospel makes the practice of religion a necessary condition of our happiness.

Secondly, That the nature and reason of the thing makes it a necessary qualification for it.

First, The gospel makes the practice of religion a necessary condition of our happiness. Our Saviour, in his first sermon, where he repeats the promise of blessedness so often, makes no promise of it to the mere knowledge of religion, but to the habit and practice of Christian graces and virtues, of meekness, and humility, and mercifulness, and righteousness, and peaceableness, "and purity, and patience under sufferings, and persecutions for righteousness' sake." And (Matt. vii. 22.) our Saviour doth most fully declare, that the happiness which he promises did not belong to those who made profession of his name, and were so well acquainted with his doctrine, as to be able to instruct others, if themselves in the mean time did not practise it; "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wondrous works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." Though they profess to know him, yet, because their lives were not answerable to the knowledge which they had of him and his doctrine, he declares that he will not know them, but bid them depart from him. And then he goes on to shew, that though a man attend to the doctrine of Christ, and gain the knowledge of it; yet, if it do not descend into his life, and govern his actions, all that man's hopes of

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heaven are fond and groundless; and only that man's hopes of heaven are well grounded, who knows the doctrine of Christ and does it: (ver. 24.) "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock: and every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Though a man had a knowledge of religion as great and perfect as that which Solomon had of natural things, large as the sand upon the sea-shore, yet all this knowledge separated from practice would be like the sand also in another respect, a weak foundation for any man to build his hopes of happiness upon.

To the same purpose St. Paul speaks: (Rom. ii. 13.) "Not the hearers of the law are just before God; but the doers of the law shall be justified." So likewise St. James: (chap. i. 22.) "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves;" and, (ver. 25.) "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, (that is, the law or doctrine of the gospel,) and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed;" and therefore he adds, that the truth and reality of religion are to be measured by the effects of it, in the government of our words, and ordering of our lives: (ver. 26.) "If any man among you seem to be religious, and

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bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Men talk of religion, and keep a great stir about it; but nothing will pass for "true religion before God," but the virtuous and charitable actions of a good life; and God will accept no man to eternal life upon any other condition. So the apostle tells us most expressly: (Heb. xii. 14.) "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Secondly, As God hath made the practice of religion a necessary condition of our happiness, so the very nature and reason of the thing makes it a necessary qualification for it. It is necessary that we become like to God, in order to the enjoyment of him; and nothing makes us like to God, but the practice of holiness and goodness. Knowledge, indeed, is a Divine perfection; but that alone, as it doth not render a man like God, so neither doth it dispose him for the enjoyment of him. If a man had the understanding of an angel, he might for all that be a devil; "he that committeth sin is of the devil," and whatever knowledge such a man may have, he is of a devilish temper and disposition: "but every one that doeth righteousness is born of God." By this we are like God, and only by our likeness to him, do we become capable of the sight and enjoyment of him; therefore every man that hopes to be happy by the blessed sight of God in the next life, must endeavour after holiness in this life. So the same apostle tells us, (1 John iii. 3.) "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth

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himself, even as he is pure." A wicked temper and disposition of mind is, in the very nature of the thing, utterly inconsistent with all reasonable hopes of heaven.

Thus I have shewn that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness.

And now the proper inference from all this is, to put men upon the careful practice of religion. Let no man content himself with the knowledge of his duty, unless he do it; and to this purpose I shall briefly urge these three considerations:

First, This is the great end of all our knowledge in religion, to practise what we know. The knowledge of God and of our duty hath so essential a respect to practice, that the Scripture will hardly allow it to be properly called knowledge, unless it have an influence upon our lives: (1 John ii. 3, 4.) "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Secondly, Practice is the best way to increase and perfect our knowledge. Knowledge directs us in our practice, but practice confirms and increaseth our knowledge: (John vii. 17.) "If a man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine." The best way to know God, is to be like him ourselves, and to have the lively image of his perfections imprinted upon our souls; and the best way to understand the Christian religion, is seriously to set about the practice of it; this will give a man a better notion of Christianity, than any speculation can.

Thirdly, Without the practice of religion, our

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knowledge will be so far from being any furtherance and advantage to our happiness, that it will be one of the unhappiest aggravations of our misery. He that is ignorant of his duty, hath some excuse to pretend for himself: but he that understands the Christian religion, and does not live according to it, hath no cloak for his sin. The defects of our knowledge, unless they be gross and wilful, will find an easy pardon with God: but the faults of our lives shall be severely punished, when we know our duty, and would not do it. I will conclude with that of our Saviour: (Luke xii. 47, 48.) "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required." When we come into the other world, no consideration will sting us more, and add more to the rage of our torments than this, that we did wickedly, when we understood to have done better; and chose to make ourselves miserable, when we knew so well the way to have been happy.

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SERMON CXIII.

PRACTICE IN RELIGION NECESSARY IN PROPORTION TO OUR KNOWLEDGE.

And that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.—LUKE xii. 47, 48.

IN prosecution of the argument which I handled in my last discourse; namely, that the knowledge of our duty, without the practice of it, will not bring us to happiness, I shall proceed to shew, that if our practice be not answerable to our knowledge, this will be a great aggravation both of our sin and punishment.

And to this purpose, I have pitched upon these words of our Lord, which are the application of two parables, which he had delivered before, to stir up men to a diligent and careful practice of their duty, that so they may be in a continual readiness and preparation for the coming of their Lord. The first parable is more general, and concerns all men, who are represented as so many servants in a great family, from which the lord is absent, and they being uncertain of the time of his return, should always be in a condition and posture to receive him. Upon the hearing of this parable, Peter inquires of our Saviour, whether he intended this only for his dis-

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ciples, or for all? To which question our Saviour returns an answer in another parable which more particularly concerned them; who, because they were to be the chief rulers and governors of his church, are represented by the stewards of a great family: (ver. 42.) "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?" If he discharge his duty, blessed is he; but if he shall take occasion in his lord's absence to domineer over his fellow-servants, and riotously to waste his lord's goods, his lord, when he comes, will punish him after a more severe and exemplary manner.

And then follows the application of the whole in the words of the text: "and that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." As if he had said, and well may such a servant deserve so severe a punishment, who having such a trust committed to him, and knowing his lord's will so much better, yet does contrary to it; upon which our Saviour takes occasion to compare the fault and punishment of those who have greater advantages and opportunities of knowing their duty, with those who are ignorant of it; "that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." And then he adds the reason and the equity of this proceeding: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

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The words in general do allude to that law of the Jews, mentioned Deut. xxv. 2. where the judge is required to see the malefactor punished according to his fault, by a certain number of stripes; in relation to which known law among the Jews, our Saviour here says, that "those who knew their lord's will, and did it not, should be beaten with many stripes: but those who knew it not, should be beaten with few stripes." So that there are two observations lie plainly before us in the words.

First, That the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing his duty, if he do it not, the greater will be his condemnation; "the servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes."

Secondly, That ignorance is a great excuse of men's faults, and will lessen their punishment; "but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes."

I shall begin with the latter of these first, because it will make way for the other; viz. that ignorance is a great excuse of men's faults, and will lessen their punishment; "he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes."

For the clearing of this, it will be requisite to consider what ignorance it is which our Saviour here speaks of; and this is necessary to be inquired into, because it is certain that there is some sort of ignorance which doth wholly excuse and clear from all manner of guilt; and there is another sort, which doth either not at all, or very little, extenuate the faults of men; so that it must be a third sort, different from both these, which our Saviour here means.

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First, There is an ignorance which doth wholly excuse and clear from all manner of guilt, and that is an absolute and invincible ignorance, when a person is wholly ignorant of the thing, which, if he knew, he should be bound to do, but neither can nor could have helped it, that he is ignorant of it; that is, he either had not the capacity, or wanted the means and opportunity, of knowing it. In this case a person is in no fault, if he did not do what he never knew, nor could know to be his duty. For God measures the faults of men by their wills, and if there be no defect there, there can be no guilt; for no man is guilty, but he that is conscious to himself that he would not do what he knew he ought to do, or would do what he knew he ought not to do. Now, if a man be simply and invincibly ignorant of his duty, his neglect of it is altogether involuntary; for the will hath nothing to do, where the understanding doth not first direct. And this is the case of children who are not yet come to the use of reason; for though they may do that which is materially a fault, yet it is none in them, because, by reason of their incapacity, they are at present invincibly ignorant of what they ought to do. And this is the case likewise of idiots, who are under a natural incapacity of knowledge, and so far as they are so, nothing that they do is imputed to them as a fault. The same may be said of distracted persons, who are deprived either wholly, or at some times, of the use of their understandings: so far, and so long as they are thus deprived, they are free from all guilt; and to persons who have the free and perfect use of their reason, no neglect of any duty is imputed, of which they are absolutely and invincibly ignorant. For instance, it is a duty incumbent upon all mankind,

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to believe in the Son of God, where he is sufficiently manifested and revealed to them; but those who never heard of him, nor had any opportunity of coming to the knowledge of him, shall not be condemned for this infidelity, because it is impossible they should believe on him of whom they never heard; they may, indeed, be condemned upon other accounts, for sinning against the light of nature, and for not obeying the law which was "written in their hearts;" for what the apostle says of the revelation of the law, is as true of any other revelation of God. "As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law:" (Rom. ii. 12.) in like manner, those who have sinned without the gospel, (that is, who never had the knowledge of it) shall not be condemned for any offence against that revelation which was never made to them, but for their violation of the law of nature; only they that have sinned under the gospel shall be judged by it.

Secondly, There is likewise another sort of ignorance, which either does not at all, or very little, extenuate the faults of men; when men are not only ignorant, but choose to be so; that is, when they wilfully neglect those means and opportunities of knowledge which are afforded to them; such as Job speaks of: (Job xxi. 14.) "Who say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And this sort of ignorance many among the Jews were guilty of when our Saviour came and preached to them, but they would not be instructed by him; the light came among them, but they loved "darkness rather than light," as he himself says of them; and, as he says elsewhere of the pharisees, "they rejected the council of God against themselves;"

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they wilfully shut their eyes against that light which offered itself to them; "they would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, that they might be converted and healed." Now an ignorance, in this degree wilful, can hardly be imagined to carry any excuse at all in it. He that knew not his Lord's will, because he would not know it, because he wilfully rejected the means of coming to the knowledge of it, deserves to be beaten with as many stripes, as if he had known it; because he might have known it, and would not. He that will not take notice of the king's proclamation, or will stop his ears when it is read, and afterwards offends against it, does equally deserve punishment with those who have read it, and heard it, and disobey it; because he was as grossly faulty in not knowing it; and there is no reason that any man's gross fault should be his excuse.

So that it is neither of these sorts of ignorance that our Saviour means, neither absolute and invincible ignorance, nor that which is grossly wilful and affected: for the first, men deserve not to be beaten at all, because they cannot help it; for the latter, they deserve not to be excused, because they might have helped their ignorance, and would not.

But our Saviour here speaks of such an ignorance as does in a good degree extenuate the fault, and yet not wholly excuse it; for he says of them, that they knew not their lord's will; and yet that this ignorance did not wholly excuse them from blame, nor exempt them from punishment, but they should "be beaten with few stripes." In the

Third place, then, There is an ignorance which is in some degree faulty, and yet does in a great measure excuse the faults which proceed from it; and

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this is when men are not absolutely ignorant of their duty, but only in comparison of others, who have a far more clear and distinct knowledge of it; and though they do not grossly and wilfully neglect the means of further knowledge, yet, perhaps, they do not make the best use they might of the opportunities they have of knowing their duty better; and therefore, in comparison of others, who have far better means and advantages of knowing their Lord's will, they may be said not to know it, though they are not simply ignorant of it, but only have a more obscure and uncertain knowledge of it. Now this ignorance does in a great measure excuse such persons, and extenuate their crimes, in comparison of those who had a clearer and more perfect knowledge of their Master's will; and yet it does not free them from all guilt, because they did not live up to that degree of knowledge which they had; and perhaps if they had used more care and industry, they might have known their Lord's will better. And this was the case of the heathens, who, in comparison of those who enjoyed the light of the gospel, might be said not to have known their Lord's will; though as to many parts of their duty, they had some directions from natural light, and their consciences did urge them to many things by the obscure apprehensions and hopes of a future reward, and the fear of a future punishment. But this was but a very obscure and uncertain knowledge, in comparison of the clear light of the gospel, which hath discovered to us our duty so plainly by the laws and precepts of it, and hath presented us with such powerful motives and arguments to obedience in the promises and threatenings of it. And this, likewise, is the case of many Christians, who, either through

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the natural slowness of their understandings, or by the neglect of their parents and teachers, or other circumstances of their education, have had far less means and advantages of knowledge than others. God does not expect so much from those as from others, to whom he hath given greater capacity and advantages of knowledge; and when our Lord shall come to call his servants to an account, they shall be beaten with fewer stripes than others; they shall not wholly escape, because they were not wholly ignorant; but by how much they had less knowledge than others, by so much their punishment shall be lighter.

And there is all the equity in the world it should be so, that men should be accountable according to what they have received, and that, to whom less is given, less should be required at their hands. The Scripture hath told us, that "God will judge the world in righteousness;" now justice does require, that, in taxing the punishment of offenders, every thing should be considered that may be a just excuse and extenuation of their crimes, and that, accordingly, their punishment should be abated. Now the greatest extenuation of any fault is ignorance, which, when it proceeds from no fault of ours, no fault can proceed from it; so that so far as any man is innocently ignorant of his duty, so far he is excusable for the neglect of it: for every degree of ignorance takes off so much from the perverseness of the will; *et nihil ardet in inferno, nisi propria voluntas.* "Nothing is punished in hell but what is voluntary, and proceeds from our wills."

I do not intend this discourse for any commendation of ignorance, or encouragement to it. For knowledge hath many advantages above it, and is

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much more desirable, if we use it well; and if we do not, it is our own fault; if we be not wanting to ourselves, we may be much happier by our knowledge than any man can be by his ignorance; for though ignorance may plead an excuse, yet it can hope for no reward; and it is always better to need no excuse, than to have the best in the world ready at hand to plead for ourselves. Besides that, we may do well to consider, that ignorance is no where an excuse where it is cherished; so that it would be the vainest thing in the world for any man to foster it in hopes thereby to excuse himself; for where it is wilful and chosen it is a fault, and (as I said before) it is the most unreasonable thing in the world, that any man's fault should prove his excuse. So that this can be no encouragement to ignorance, to say that it extenuates the faults of men: for it does not extenuate them whenever it is wilful and affected; and whenever it is designed and chosen it is wilful; and then no man can reasonably design to continue ignorant, that he may have an excuse for his faults, because then the ignorance is wilful; and, whenever it is so, it ceaseth to be an excuse.

I the rather speak this, because ignorance hath had the good fortune to meet with great patrons in the world, and to be extolled, though not upon this account, yet upon another, for which there is less pretence of reason; as if it were the mother of devotion. Of superstition, I grant it is, and of this we see plentiful proof among those who are so careful to preserve and cherish it: but that true piety and devotion should spring from it, is as unlikely as that darkness should produce light. I do hope, indeed, and charitably believe, that the ignorance in which some are detained by their teachers and go-

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vernors, will be a real excuse to as many of them as are otherwise honest and sincere: but I doubt not, but the errors and faults which proceed from this ignorance will lie heavy upon those who keep them in it. I proceed to the

Second observation, That the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing the will of God, and his duty, the greater will be his condemnation if he do not do it. "The servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes.—Which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself;" the preparation of our mind to do the will of God, whenever there is occasion and opportunity for it, is accepted with him; a will rightly disposed to obey God, though it be not brought into act for want of opportunity, does not lose its reward: but when, notwithstanding we know not our Lord's will, there are neither of these, neither the act nor the preparation and resolution of doing it, what punishment may we not expect?

The just God, in punishing the sins of men, proportions the punishment to the crime, and where the crime is greater, the punishment riseth; as amongst the Jews, where the crime was small, the malefactor was sentenced to a "few stripes," where it was great, he was "beaten with many." Thus our Saviour represents the great Judge of the world dealing with sinners; according as their sins are aggravated, he will add to their punishment. Now after all the aggravations of sin, there is none that doth more intrinsically heighten the malignity of it, than when it is committed against the clear knowledge of our duty, and that upon these three accounts;

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First, Because the knowledge of God's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it.

Secondly, Because it is a great obligation upon us to the doing of it.

Thirdly, Because the neglect of our duty in this case cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and contempt. I shall speak briefly to these three:

First, Because the knowledge of God's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it; and every advantage of doing our duty is a certain aggravation of our neglect of it. And this is the reason which our Saviour adds here in the text: "For to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." It was, no doubt, a great discouragement and disadvantage to the heathens that they were so doubtful concerning the will of God, and in many cases left to the uncertainty of their own reason, by what way and means they might best apply themselves to the pleasing of him; and this discouraged several of the wisest of them from all serious endeavours in religion, thinking it as good to do nothing as to be mistaken about it. Others, that were more naturally devout, and could not satisfy their consciences without some expressions of religion, fell into various superstitions, and were ready to embrace any way of worship which custom prescribed, or the fancies of men could suggest to them: and hence sprang all the stupid and barbarous idolatries of the heathen. For ignorance growing upon the world, that natural propension which was in the minds of men to religion, and the worship of a Deity, for want of certain direction, expressed itself in those foolish and abominable idolatries which were practised among the heathens.

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And is it not, then, a mighty advantage to us, that we have the clear and certain direction of Divine revelation? We have the will of God plainly discovered to us, and all the parts of our duty clearly defined and determined, so that no man that is in any measure free from interest and prejudice, can easily mistake in any great and material part of his duty. We have the nature of God plainly revealed to us, and such a character of him given, as is most suitable to our natural conceptions of a Deity, as render him both awful and amiable; for the Scripture represents him to us as great and good, powerful and merciful, a perfect hater of sin, and a great lover of mankind, and we have the law and manner of his worship (so far as was needful), and the rules of a good life clearly expressed and laid down; and as a powerful motive and argument to the obedience of those laws, a plain discovery made to us of the endless rewards and punishments of another world. And is not this a mighty advantage to the doing of God's will, to have it so plainly declared to us, and so powerfully enforced upon us? so that our duty lies plainly before us; we see what we have to do, and the danger of neglecting it; so that, considering the advantage we have of doing God's will, by our clear knowledge of it, we are altogether inexcusable if we do it not.

Secondly, The knowledge of our Lord's will is likewise a great obligation upon us to the doing of it. For what ought in reason to oblige us more to do any thing than to be fully assured that it is the will of God, and that it is the law of the great Sovereign of the world, who is able to save or to destroy? That it is the pleasure of him that made us, and who hath declared that he designs to make us

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happy by our obedience to his laws? So that if we know these things to be the will of God, we have the greatest obligation to do them, whether we consider the authority of God, or our own interest; and if we neglect them, we have nothing to say in our own excuse. We knew the law, and the advantage of keeping it, and the penalty of breaking it; and if, after this, we will transgress, there is no apology to be made for us. They have something to plead for themselves, who can say, that though they had some apprehension of some parts of their duty, and their minds were apt to dictate to them that they ought to do some things, yet the different apprehensions of mankind about several of these things, and the doubts and uncertainties of their own minds concerning them, made them easy to be carried off from their duty, by the vicious inclinations of their own nature, and the tyranny of custom and example, and the pleasant temptations of flesh and blood; but had they had a clear and undoubted revelation from God, and had certainly known these things to be his will, this would have conquered and borne down all objections and temptations to the contrary; or, if it had not, would have stopped their mouths, and taken away all excuse from them. There is some colour in this plea, that in many cases they did not know certainly what the will of God was; but for us who own a clear revelation from God, and profess to believe it, what can we say for ourselves, to mitigate the severity of God towards us; why he should not pour forth all his wrath, and execute upon us the fierceness of his anger?

Thirdly, The neglect of God's will, when we know it, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and

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contempt. If we know it, and do it not, the fault is solely in our wills, and the more wilful any sin is, the more heinously wicked is it. There can hardly be a greater aggravation of a crime, than if it proceed from mere obstinacy and perverseness; and if we know it to be our Lord's will, and do it not, we are guilty of the highest contempt of the greatest authority in the world. And do we think this to be but a small aggravation, to affront the great and sovereign Judge of the world? not only to break his laws, but to trample upon them and despise them, when we know whose laws they are? "Will we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" We believe, that it is God who said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour; thou shalt not hate, or oppress, or defraud thy brother in any thing; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:" and will we notwithstanding venture to break these laws, knowing whose authority they are stamped withal? After this contempt of him, what favour can we hope for from him? What can we say for ourselves, why any one of those many stripes which are threatened should be abated to us? *Ignosci aliquatenus ignorantiæ potest; contemptus veniam non habet.* "Something may be pardoned to ignorance; but contempt can expect no forgiveness." He that strikes his prince, not knowing him to be so, hath something to say for himself, that though he did a disloyal act, yet it did not proceed from a disloyal mind: but he that first acknowledgeth him for his prince, and then affronts him, deserves to be prosecuted with the utmost severity, because he did it wilfully, and in mere contempt. The knowledge of our duty, and that it

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is the will of God which we go against, takes away all possible excuse from us; for nothing can be said, why we should offend him who hath both authority to command us, and power to destroy us.

And thus I have as briefly as I could, represented to you the true ground and reason of the aggravation of those sins, which are committed against the clear knowledge of God's will, and our duty; because this knowledge is so great an advantage to the doing of our duty; so great an obligation upon us to it; and because the neglect of our Lord's will, in this case, cannot be without great wilfulness, and a downright contempt of his authority.

And shall I now need to tell you, how much it concerns every one of us, to live up to that knowledge which we have of our Lord's will, and to prepare ourselves to do according to it; to be always in a readiness and disposition to do what we know to be his will, and actually to do it, when there is occasion and opportunity? And it concerns us the more, because we, in this age and nation, have so many advantages above a great part of the world, of coming to the knowledge of our duty. We enjoy the clearest and most perfect revelation which God ever made of his will to mankind, and have the light of Divine truth plentifully shed amongst us, by the free use of the Holy Scriptures, which is not a sealed book to us, but lies open to be read and studied by us; this spiritual food is rained down like manna round about our tents, and every one may gather so much as is sufficient: we are not stinted, nor have the word of God given out to us in broken pieces, or mixed and adulterated—here a lesson of Scripture, and there a legend; but whole and entire, sincere and uncorrupt.

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God hath not left us, as he did the heathens for many ages, to the imperfect and uncertain direction of natural light: nor hath he revealed his will to us, as he did to the Jews, in dark types and shadows; but hath made a clear discovery of his mind and will to us. The dispensation which we are under hath no veil upon it, "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth; we are of the day, and of the light;" and therefore it may justly be expected that we should "put off the works of darkness, and walk as children of the light." Every degree of knowledge which we have, is an aggravation of the sins committed against it, and when our Lord comes to pass sentence upon us, will add to the number of our stripes. Nay, if God should inflict no positive torment upon sinners, yet their own minds would deal most severely with them upon this account, and nothing will gall their consciences more than to remember against what light they did offend. For herein lies the very nature and sting of all guilt, to be conscious to ourselves, that we knew what we ought to have done, and did it not. The vices and corruptions which reigned in the world before will be pardonable, in comparison of ours. "The times of that ignorance God winked at; but now he commands all men every where to repent." Mankind had some excuse for their errors before, and God was pleased, in a great measure, to overlook them; but "if we continue still in our sins, we have no cloak for them." All the degrees of light which we enjoy are so many talents committed to us by our Lord, for the improving whereof he will call us to a strict account: "for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom he hath committed much, of him he will ask the

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more." And nothing is more reasonable, than that men should account for all the advantages and opportunities they have had of knowing the will of God; and that as their knowledge was increased, so their sorrow and punishment should proportionably rise, if they sin against it. The ignorance of a great part of the world is deservedly pitied and lamented by us; but the condemnation of none is so bad, as those who, having the knowledge of God's will, neglect to do it; "how much better had it been for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them!" If we had been born, and brought up in ignorance of the true God and his will, we had had no sin, in comparison of what now we have: but now that we see, our sin remains. This will aggravate our condemnation beyond measure, that we had the knowledge of salvation so clearly revealed to us. Our duty lies plainly before us; we know what we ought to do, and what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness. We believe the coming of our Lord to judgment, and we know not how soon he may be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels," not only "to take vengeance on them that know not God," but on them that have known him, and yet obey not the gospel of his Son. And if all this will not move us to prepare ourselves to do our Lord's will, we deserve to have our stripes multiplied. No condemnation can be too heavy for those who offend against the clear knowledge of God's will, and their duty.

Let us then be persuaded to set upon the practice of what we know; let the light which is in our

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understandings descend upon our hearts and lives; let us not dare to continue any longer in the practice of any known sin, nor in the neglect of any thing which we are convinced is our duty; and if our hearts condemn us not, neither for the neglect of the means of knowledge, nor for rebelling against the light of God's truth shining in our minds, and glaring upon our consciences, "then have we confidence towards God: but if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things."

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SERMON CXIV.

THE SINS OF MEN NOT CHARGEABLE UPON GOD, BUT UPON THEMSELVES.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.—JAMES i. 13, 14.

NEXT to the belief of a God, and his providence, there is nothing more fundamentally necessary to the practice of a good life, than the belief of these two principles:—that God is not the author of sin; and that every man's sin lies at his own door, and he hath reason to blame himself for all the evil that he does.

First, That God is not the author of sin, that he is no way accessary to our faults, either by tempting or forcing us to the commission of them. For if he were, they would neither properly be sins, nor could they be justly punished. They would not properly be sins, for sin is a contradiction to the will of God; but supposing men to be either tempted or necessitated thereto, that which we call sin, would either be a mere passive obedience to the will of God, or an active compliance with it, but neither way a contradiction to it. Nor could these actions be justly punished; for all punishment supposeth a fault, and a fault supposeth liberty and freedom from force and necessity; so that no man

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can be justly punished for that which he cannot help, and no man can help that which he is necessitated and compelled to. And though there were no force in the case, but only temptation, yet it would be unreasonable for the same person to tempt and punish. For as nothing is more contrary to the holiness of God, than to tempt men to sin; so nothing can be more against justice and goodness, than first to draw men into a fault, and then to chastise them for it. So that this is a principle which lies at the bottom of all religion, that God is not the author of the sins of men. And then,

Secondly, That every man's fault lies at his own door, and he has reason enough to blame himself for all the evil that he does. And this is that which makes men properly guilty, that when they have done amiss, they are conscious to themselves it was their own act, and they might have done otherwise; and guilt is that which makes men liable to punishment; and fear of punishment is the great restraint from sin, and one of the principal arguments for virtue and obedience.

And both these principles our apostle St. James does here fully assert in the words which I have read unto you. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

In which words these two things are plainly contained:

First, That God doth not tempt any man to sin. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

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Secondly, That every man's fault lies at his own door, and he is his own greatest tempter. "But every man is tempted, when he his drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

I. That God doth not tempt any man to sin. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." In which words there are three things to be considered.

First, The proposition which the apostle here rejects; and that is, that God tempts men. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God."

Secondly, The manner in which he rejects it. "Let no man say" so. By which manner of speaking, the apostle insinuates these two things:—1. That men are apt to lay their faults upon God: for when he says, "Let no man say" so, he intimates, that men are apt to say so, and it is very probable that some did say so; and, 2. That it is not only a fault, but an impious assertion, to say that God tempts men. He speaks of it as a thing to be rejected with detestation; "Let no man say;" that is, far be it from us to affirm a thing so impious and dishonourable to God.

Thirdly, The reason and argument that he brings against it; "For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

First, The proposition which the apostle here rejects, and that is, that God tempts men: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." Now, that we may the more distinctly understand the meaning of the proposition, which the apostle here rejects, it will be very requisite to consider what temptation is, and the several sorts and

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kinds of it. To tempt a man, is, in general, nothing else but to make trial of him in any kind what he will do. In Scripture, temptation is commonly confined to the trial of a man's good or bad, of his virtuous or vicious inclinations. But then it is such a trial as endangers a man's virtue; and, if he be not well resolved, is likely to overcome it, and to make him fall into sin. So that temptation does always imply something of danger the worst way. And men are thus tempted, either from themselves, or by others; by others, chiefly these two ways:

First, By direct and downright persuasions to sin.

Secondly, By being brought into such circumstances as will greatly endanger their falling into it, though none solicit and persuade them to it.

First, By direct and downright persuasions to sin. Thus the devil tempted our first parents, by representing things so to them, as might on the one hand incite them to sin, and on the other hand weaken and loosen that which was the great curb and restraint from it. On the one hand, he represents to them the advantages they should have by breaking God's command: "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." On the other hand, he represents the danger of offending not to be so great and certain as they imagined: "The serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die." And the devil had so good success in this way of tempting the first Adam, as to encourage him to set upon the second, our blessed Saviour, in the same manner; for he would have persuaded him to fall down and worship him, by offering him "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." And thus bad men many times

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tempt others, and endeavour to draw them into the same wicked courses with themselves. Solomon represents to us the manner and the danger of it: (Prov. i. 10, 11. 13, 14.) "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not; if they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause; we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot amongst us, let us all have one purse." This is the first way of temptation.

And to be sure God tempts no man this way. He offers no arguments to man to persuade him to sin; he no where proposeth either reward or impunity to sinners; but, on the contrary, gives all imaginable encouragement to obedience, and threatens the transgression of his law with most dreadful punishments.

Secondly, Men are likewise tempted, by being brought into such circumstances, as will greatly endanger their falling into sin, though none persuade them to it; and this happens two ways; when men are remarkably beset with the allurements of the world, or assaulted with the evils and calamities of it; for either of these conditions are great temptations to men, and make powerful assaults upon them, especially when they fall upon those who are ill disposed before, or are but of a weak virtue and resolution.

The allurements of the world are strong temptations; riches, honours, and pleasures, are the occasions and incentives to many lusts. Honour and greatness, power and authority over others, especially when men are suddenly lifted up, and from a low condition, are apt to transport men to pride and insolency towards others. Power is a strong liquor

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which does easily intoxicate weak minds, and make them apt to say and do indecent things. "Man that is in honour and understands not, is like the beasts that perish;" intimating, that men who are exalted to a high condition, are very apt to forget themselves, and to play the fools and beasts. It requires great consideration, and a well-poised mind, not to be lifted up with one's condition. Weak heads are apt to turn and grow dizzy, when they look down from a great height.

And so likewise ease and prosperity are a very slippery condition to most men, and without great care do endanger the falling into great sins. So Solomon observes;" (Prov. i. 32.) "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." For this reason, Agur maketh his prayer to God, that he would give him neither poverty nor riches, but keep him in a mean condition, because of the danger of both extremes: (Prov. xxx. 8, 9.) "Give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee." Both the eager desire and the possession and enjoyment of riches do frequently prove fatal to men. So our Saviour tells us, elsewhere, very emphatically: (Matt. xix. 23, 24.) "Verily, I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven: and again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." St. Paul likewise very fully declares unto us the great danger of this condition: (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.) "But they that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from

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the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

But the greatest bait of all to flesh and blood, is sensual pleasures; the very presence and opportunity of these, are apt to kindle the desires, and to inflame the lusts of men, especially where these temptations meet with suitable tempers, where every spark that falls catcheth.

And, on the other hand, the evils and calamities of this world, especially if they threaten or fall upon men in any degree of extremity, are strong temptations to human nature. Poverty and want, pain and suffering, and the fear of any great evil, especially of death, these are great straits to human nature, and apt to tempt men to great sins, to impatience and discontent, to unjust and dishonest shifts, to the forsaking of God, and apostacy from his truth and religion. Agur was sensible of the dangerous temptation of poverty, and therefore he prays against that as well as against riches; "Give me not poverty, lest being poor I steal, and take the name of the Lord my God in vain;" that is, lest I be tempted to theft and perjury. The devil, whose trade it is to tempt men to sin, knew very well the force of these sorts of temptations, when he desires God first to touch Job in his estate, and to see what effect that would have: (Job i. 11.) "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." And when he found himself deceived in this, surely he thought, that were he but afflicted with great bodily pains, that would put him out of all patience, and flesh and blood would not be able to withstand this temptation: (chap. ii. 5.) "But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." And this

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was the great temptation that the primitive Christians were assaulted withal; they were tempted to forsake Christ and his religion, by a most violent persecution, by the spoiling of their goods, by imprisonment, and torture, and death. And this is that kind of temptation which the apostle particularly speaks of before the text: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him;" and then it follows, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." And thus I have given an account of the several sorts of temptations comprehended under this second head; namely, when men are tempted by being brought into such circumstances as do greatly endanger their falling into sin, by the allurements of this world, and by the evils and calamities of it.

Now the question is, how far God hath a hand in these kind of temptations, that so we may know how to limit this proposition, which the apostle here rejects, that men are tempted of God. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God."

That the providence of God does order, or at least permit, men to be brought into these circumstances I have spoken of, which are such dangerous temptations to sin, no man can doubt, that believes his providence to be concerned in the affairs of the world. All the difficulty is, how far the apostle does here intend to exempt God from a hand in these temptations. Now, for the clearer understanding of this, it will be requisite to consider the several ends and reasons, which those who tempt others may have in tempting them; and all temptation is for one of these three ends, or reasons; either for the trial and improvement of men's virtues; or by way of judg-

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ment and punishment for some former great sins and provocations; or with a direct purpose and design to seduce men to sin; these I think are the chief ends and reasons that can be imagined, of exercising men with dangerous temptations.

First, For the exercise and improvement of men's graces and virtues. And this is the end which God always aims at, in bringing good men, or permitting them to be brought, into dangerous temptations. And therefore St. James speaks of it as a matter of joy, when good men are exercised with afflictions; not because afflictions are desirable for themselves, but because of the happy consequences of them: (ver. 2, 3. of this chapter,) "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations: knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." And to the same purpose St. Paul: (Rom. v. 3—5.) "We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience;" δοκιμήν· patience trieth a man, and this "trial worketh hope, and hope maketh not ashamed." These are happy effects and consequences of affliction and suffering, when they improve the virtues of men and increase their graces, and thereby make way for the increase of their glory. Upon this account, St. James pronounceth those blessed who are thus tempted. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

And this certainly is no disparagement to the providence of God, to permit men to be thus tempted, when he permits it for no other end but to make them better men, and thereby to prepare them for a greater reward: and so the apostle assures us,

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(Rom. viii. 17, 18.) "If so be we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him; for I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." And, (ver. 28.) "For we know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God." And this happy end and issue of temptations to good men the providence of God secures to them (if they be not wanting to themselves) one of these two ways; either by proportioning the temptation to their strength; or, if it exceed that, by ministering new strength and support to them, by the secret and extraordinary aids of his Holy Spirit.

First, By proportioning the temptation to their strength; ordering things so by his secret and wise providence, that they shall not be assaulted by any temptation, which is beyond their strength to resist and overcome. And herein the security of good men doth ordinarily consist; and the very best of us, those who have the firmest and most resolute virtue, were in infinite danger, if the providence of God did not take this care of us. For a temptation may set upon the best men with so much violence, or surprise them at such an advantage, as no ordinary degree of grace and virtue is able to withstand: but where men are sincerely good, and honestly resolved, the providence of God doth ward off these fierce blows, and put by these violent thrusts, and by a secret disposal of things, keep them from being assaulted by these irresistible kinds of temptations.

The consideration whereof, as it is a great encouragement to men to be sincerely good, so likewise a great argument for a continual dependance upon the providence of God, and to take us off from confidence in ourselves, and our own strength. And this

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use the apostle makes of it: (1 Cor. x. 12.) "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, (that is, confident that nothing shall be able to shake him, or throw him down) take heed lest he fall; there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to men;" εἰ μὴ ἀνθρώπινος, *but what is human;* nothing but what a human strength, assisted by an ordinary grace of God, may be able to resist and conquer. But there are greater and more violent temptations than these, which you have not yet been tried with; and when those happen, we must have recourse to God for an extraordinary assistance. And this is the

Second way I mentioned, whereby the providence of God does secure good men in case of extraordinary temptations, which no human strength can probably resist. And this the same apostle assures us of in the very next words: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it." That is, in case of great and violent temptations (such as the Christians in the height of their persecutions were exposed to), God will secretly minister strength and support equal to the force and power of the temptation. And this God did in an extraordinary manner to the Christian martyrs, and that to such a degree, as made them joyfully to embrace their sufferings, and with the greatest cheerfulness in the world to endure those torments, which no human patience was able to bear. And where God doth thus secure men against temptations, or support them under them, it is no reflection at all upon the goodness or justice of his providence, to permit them to be thus tempted.

Secondly, God permits others to be thus tempted,

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by way of judgment and punishment, for some former great sins and provocations which they have been guilty of. And thus many times God punisheth great and notorious offenders, by permitting them to fall into great temptations, which, meeting with a vicious disposition, are likely to be too hard for them, especially considering how by a long habit of wickedness, and wilful commission of great and notorious sins, they have made themselves an easy prey to every temptation, and have driven the Spirit of God from them, and deprived themselves of those aids and restraints of his grace, which he ordinarily affords, not only to good men, but likewise to those who are not very bad. And thus God is said to have hardened Pharaoh by those plagues and judgments which he sent upon him and his kingdom. But if we carefully read the story, it is said that he first hardened himself, and then that God hardened him; that is, he being hardened under the first judgments of God, God sent more, which, meeting with his obstinacy, had this natural effect upon him, to harden him yet more; not that God did infuse any wickedness or obstinacy into him, but by his just judgments sent more plagues upon him, which hardened him yet more, and which were likely to have that effect upon him, considering the ill temper of the man. And it was just by way of punishment that they should. And so likewise, (Joshua xi. 19, 20.) it is said that the cities of the Canaanites did not make peace with Joshua, because "it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly;" that is, for their former iniquities, the measure whereof was now full, the providence of God did justly bring them into,

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and leave them under, those circumstances, which made them obstinate against all terms of peace; and this proved fatal to them.

And in the like sense we are to understand several other expressions in Scripture, which likewise might seem very harsh. As, (Isaiah vi. 10.) "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert and be healed;" all which expressions signify no more, but that God, for the former provocations and impenitency of that people, did leave them to their own hardness and blindness, so that they did not desire to understand and make use of the means of their recovery. So likewise, (Rom. i. 24.) God is said to have given up the idolatrous heathen "to uncleanness, to vile and unnatural lusts;" and, (ver. 28.) "to a reprobate and injudicious mind;" that is, as a punishment of their idolatry, he left them to the power of those temptations, which betrayed them to the vilest lusts. And to mention but one text more, (2 Thess. ii. 11.) the apostle threatens those that rejected the truth, that "for this cause God would send them strong delusions (the efficacy of error), that they should believe a lie, and that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness;" that is, as a just punishment for their renouncing the truth, God gave them over to the power of delusion; their error had its full scope at them, to tempt them with all its colours and pretences.

But it is observable, that, in all these places which I have mentioned, God is said to give men up to the power of temptation, as a punishment of some former great crimes and provocations. And it is not un-

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just with God thus to deal with men, to leave them to the power of temptation, when they had first wilfully forsaken him; and in this case God doth not tempt men to sin, but leaves them to themselves, to be tempted by their own hearts' lusts; and if they yield and are conquered, it is their own fault, because they have neglected God's grace, whereby they might have been able to have resisted those temptations; and have forced his Holy Spirit to withdraw himself from them, and to leave them open and naked to those assaults of temptation, against which they might otherwise have been sufficiently armed.

Thirdly, The last end of temptation which I mentioned, is to try men, with a direct purpose and intention to seduce men to sin. Thus wicked men tempt others, and thus the devil tempts men. Thus he tempted our first parents, and seduced them from their obedience and allegiance to God. Thus he tempted Job, by bringing him into those circumstances, which were very likely to have forced him into impatience and discontent. And thus he tempted our blessed Saviour: but found nothing in him to work upon, or to give him any advantage over him. And thus he daily tempts men, by laying all sorts of baits and snares before them, going about continually, seeking whom he may seduce and destroy; and as far as God permits him, and his power reacheth, he suits his temptations as near as he can to the humours, and appetites, and inclinations of men, contriving them into such circumstances, as that he may ply his temptations upon them to the greatest advantage: propounding such objects to them, as may most probably draw forth the corruptions of men, and kindle their irregular desires, and inflame their lusts, and tempt their evil inclinations that way,

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which they are most strongly bent. He tempts the covetous man with gain, the ambitious man with preferment, the voluptuous man with carnal and sensual pleasures; and, where none of these baits will take, he stirs up his instruments to persecute those who are steadfast and confirmed in resolutions of piety and virtue, to try if he can work upon their fear, and shake their constancy and fidelity to God and goodness, that way; and all this he doth with a direct design and earnest desire to seduce men from their duty, and to betray them to sin.

But thus God tempts no man; and in this sense it is that the apostle means that "no man when he is tempted, is tempted of God." God hath no design to seduce any man to sin. He often proves the obedience of men, and suffers them to fall into divers temptations, for the trial of their faith, and exercise of their obedience and other virtues; and he permits bad men to be assaulted with great temptations, and, as a punishment of their former obstinacy and impiety, withdraws the aids and assistances of his grace from them, and leaves them to their own weakness and folly; but not so as to take away all restraint of his grace even from bad men, unless it be upon very high provocation, and a long and obstinate continuance in sin: but God never tempts any man, with any intention to seduce him to sin, and with a desire he should do wickedly. This is the proper work of the devil and his instruments; in this sense it is far from God to tempt any man; and whenever, in the ordinary course, and by the common permission of his providence, men fall into temptation, the utmost that God does, is to leave them to themselves; and he does not do this

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neither, but to those who have highly provoked him to depart from them; that is, to those who have justly deserved to be so dealt withal.

And thus I have considered the proposition which the apostle here rejects; namely, that God tempts men; and have shewn, as clearly as I can, how it is to be limited and understood. I now proceed to the second thing which I propounded to consider; viz. the manner in which the apostle rejects this proposition, "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." By which manner of speaking, he insinuates two things.

First, That men are apt to lay their faults upon God. For when he says, "Let no man say" so, he intimates that men were apt to say thus; and it is probable some did say so, to excuse themselves for their deserting their religion upon the temptation of persecution and suffering. It is not unlikely that men might lay the fault upon God's providence, which exposed them to these difficult trials, and thereby tempted them to forsake their religion.

But however this be, we find it very natural to men, to transfer their faults upon others. Men are naturally sensible when they offend, and do contrary to their duty; and the guilt of sin is a heavy burden, of which men would be glad to ease themselves as much as they can; and they think it is a mitigation and excuse of their faults, if they did not proceed only from themselves, but from the violence and compulsion, the temptation and instigation, of others. But, especially, men are very glad to lay their faults upon God, because he is a full and sufficient excuse, nothing being to be blamed that comes from him. Thus Adam did, upon the commission of the very first sin that mankind was guilty of.

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When God charged him for breaking of his law, by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, he endeavours to excuse himself by laying the fault obliquely upon God; "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me;" he does what he can to derive the fault upon God. And though this be very unreasonable, yet it seems it is very natural. Men would fain have the pleasure of committing sin, but then they would be glad to remove as much of the trouble and guilt of it from themselves as they can.

Secondly, This manner of speech, which the apostle here useth, doth insinuate further to us, that it is not only a false, but an impious assertion, to say that God tempts men to sin. He speaks of it, not only as a thing unfit to be said, but fit to be rejected with the greatest indignation; "Let no man say," that is, far it be from us to affirm any thing so impious and so dishonourable to God. For nothing can be more contrary to the holy and righteous nature of God, and to those plain declarations which he hath made of himself, than to seduce men to wickedness; and therefore no man, that hath any regard to the honour of God, can entertain the least suspicion of his having any hand in the sins of men, or give heed to any principles or doctrines, from whence so odious and abominable a consequence may be drawn. I proceed to the

Third thing I propounded to consider; namely, The reason or argument which the apostle brings against this impious suggestion; that "God cannot be tempted with evil;" and therefore no man can imagine that he should tempt any man to it; "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted

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of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." And in speaking to this, I shall,

First, Consider the strength and force of this argument: and,

Secondly, The nature and kind of it.

First, The strength and force of this argument, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man;" ἀπείραστός ἐστι κακῶν; *he is untemptible by evil;* he cannot be drawn to any thing that is bad himself, and therefore it cannot be imagined he should have any inclination or design to seduce others. And this will appear to be a strong and forcible argument, if we consider,

First, The proposition upon which it is grounded, that "God cannot be tempted by evil."

Secondly, The consequence that clearly follows from it; and that is, that because God cannot be tempted by evil, therefore he cannot tempt any man to it.

First, We will consider the proposition upon which this argument is built, and that is, that "God cannot be tempted by evil." He is out of the reach of any temptation to evil. Whoever is tempted to any thing, is either tempted by his own inclination, or by the allurement of the object, or by some external motive and consideration: but none of all these can be imagined to have any place in God, to tempt him to evil.

For, first, he hath no temptation to it from his own inclination. The holy and pure nature of God is at the greatest distance from evil, and at the greatest contrariety to it. He is so far from having any inclination to evil, that it is the only thing in the world to which he hath an irreconcilable antipathy

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This the Scripture frequently declares to us, and that in a very emphatical manner: (Psal. v. 4.) "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him." The words are a diminution, and less is said than is intended by them; the meaning is, that God is so far from taking pleasure in sin, that he hath a perfect hatred and abhorrence of it: (Hab. i. 13.) "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity." As when men hate a thing to the highest degree, they turn away their eyes, and cannot endure to look upon it. Light and darkness are not more opposite to one another, than the holy nature of God is to sin. "What fellowship hath light with darkness, or God with Belial?"

Secondly, There is no allurement in the object, to stir up any inclination to him towards it. Sin in its very nature is imperfection, and irregularity, crookedness, and deformity; so that, unless there be an inclination to it beforehand, there is nothing in it to move any one's liking or desire towards it; it hath no attractives or enticements in it, but to a corrupt and ill-disposed mind.

Thirdly, Neither are there external motives and considerations, that can be imagined to tempt God to it. All arguments that have any temptation, are either founded in hope or fear; either in the hope of gaining some benefit or advantage, or in the fear of falling into some mischief or inconvenience. Now the Divine Nature, being perfectly happy, and perfectly secured in its own happiness, is out of the reach of any of these temptations. Men are many times tempted to evil very strongly by these considerations; they want many things to make them happy, and they fear many things which may make

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them miserable; and the hopes of the one and the fears of the other, are apt to work very powerfully upon them, to seduce them from their duty, and to draw them to sin: but the Divine Nature is firm against all these attempts, by its own fulness and security. So that you see now the proposition, upon which the apostle grounds his argument, is evidently true, and beyond all exception, that "God cannot be tempted with evil." Let us then, in the

Second place, Consider the consequence that clearly follows from it, that because God cannot be tempted with evil, therefore he cannot tempt any man to it. For why should he desire to draw men into that which he himself abhors, and which is so contrary to his own nature and disposition? When men tempt one another to sin, they do it to make others like themselves; and when the devil tempts men to sin, it is either out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men. But none of these considerations can have any place in God, or be any motive to him to tempt men to sin.

Bad men tempt others to sin, to make them like themselves, and that with one of these two designs; either for the comfort or pleasure of company, or for the countenance of it, that there may be some kind of apology and excuse for them.

For the comfort and pleasure of company. Man does not love to be alone; and for this reason bad men endeavour to make others like themselves, that, agreeing with them in the same disposition and manners, they may be fit company for them. For no man takes pleasure in the society and conversation of those, who are of contrary tempers and inclinations to them, because they are continually warring

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and clashing with one another. And for this reason bad men hate and persecute those that are good. "Let us lie in wait (say they) for the righteous, because he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings; he is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other men's, and his ways are of another fashion;" as it is expressed in the Wisdom of Solomon. So that wicked men tempt others to sin, that they may have the pleasure and contentment of their society. But now, for this reason, God cannot be imagined to tempt men to sin, because that would be the way to make them unlike himself, and such as his soul could take no pleasure in.

Another design that bad men have in seducing others to sin, is thereby to give countenance to their bad actions, and to be some kind of excuse and apology for them. Among men, the multitude of offenders does sometimes procure impunity, but it always gives countenance to vice; and men are apt to allege it in their excuse, that they are not alone guilty of such a fault—that they did not do it without company and example; which is the reason of that law, (Exod. xxiii. 2.) "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil;" implying, that men are very apt to take encouragement to any thing that is bad, from company and example. But neither hath this reason any place in God, who, being far from doing evil himself, can have no reason to tempt others to do so, by way of excuse and vindication of himself.

And when the devil tempts men to sin, it is either out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men. Out of malice to God, to spoil his workmanship, and to pervert that which came innocent and up-

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right out of his hands; to rob God of his subjects, and to debauch them from their duty and allegiance to him; to strengthen the rebellion which he has raised against God, and to make him as many enemies as he can. But for this end God cannot tempt any man; for this would be to procure dishonour to himself, and to deface the work of his own hands.

Another reason why the devil tempts men is envy. When he was fallen from God and happiness, and by his own rebellion had made himself miserable, he was discontented to see the happy condition of man, and it grieved him at his very heart; and this moved him to tempt man to sin, that he might involve him in the same misery into which he had plunged himself. It is a pleasure to envy to overturn the happiness of others, and to lay them level with themselves. But the Divine nature is full of goodness, and delights in the happiness of all his creatures. His own incomparable felicity has placed him as much above any temptation to envying others, as above any occasion of being contemned by them. He grudges no man's happiness, and therefore cannot tempt men to sin, out of a desire to see them miserable. So that none of those considerations which move the devil to tempt men to sin, and evil men to tempt one another to do wickedly, can be imagined to have any place in God.

And thus you see the force of the apostle's argument, that because "God cannot be tempted to evil," therefore he can tempt no man. None tempt others to be bad, but those who are first so themselves. I shall now, in the

Second place, Consider the nature and kind of the argument which the apostle here useth: "Let

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no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." He does not reject this impious proposition barely upon his own authority; but he argues against it from the nature and perfection of God; and therein appeals to the common notions of mankind concerning God. We might very well have rested in his authority, being an apostle commissioned by our Saviour, and extraordinarily assisted and witnessed to, by the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, wherewith he was endowed: but he condescends to give a reason of what he says, and appeals to the common principles of mankind. For all men will readily agree to this, that God hath all imaginable perfection: but it is a plain imperfection to be liable to be tempted to evil, and therefore, "God cannot be tempted to evil." And, if so, it is as impossible that he should tempt others to it; for none can have either an inclination or interest to seduce others to evil, but those who have been first seduced to it themselves.

Now, in this method of arguing, the apostle teacheth us one of the surest ways of reasoning in religion; namely, from the natural notions which men have of God. So that all doctrines plainly contrary to those natural notions which men have of God are to be rejected, what authority soever they pretend to; whatever plainly derogates from the goodness or justice of God, or any other of his perfections, is certainly false, what authority soever it may claim from the judgment of learned and pious men; yea, though it pretend to be countenanced from the texts and expressions of Holy Scripture: because nothing can be entertained as a Divine revelation, which plainly contradicts the

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common natural notions which mankind have of God. For all reasoning about Divine revelation, and whether that which pretends to be so be really so or not, is to be governed by those natural notions. And if any thing that pretends to be a revelation from God, should teach men that there is no God, or that he is not wise, and good, and just, and powerful; this is reason enough to reject it, how confident soever the pretence be, that it is a Divine revelation.

And if any thing be, upon good grounds in reason, received for a Divine revelation (as the Holy Scriptures are amongst Christians), no man ought to be regarded, who from thence pretends to maintain any doctrine contrary to the natural notions which men have of God; such as clearly contradict his holiness, or goodness, or justice, or do, by plain and undeniable consequence, make God the author of sin, or the like; because the very attempt to prove any such thing out of Scripture, does strike at the Divine authority of those books. For if they be from God, it is certain they can contain no such thing. So that no man ought to suffer himself to be seduced into any such opinions, upon pretence that there are expressions in Scripture which seem to countenance them. For if they really did so, the consequence would not be the confirming of such opinions, but the weakening of the authority of the Scripture itself. For just so many arguments as any man can draw from Scripture for any such opinion, so many weapons he puts into the hands of atheists against the Scripture itself.

I do not speak this as if I thought there were any ground from Scripture for any such doctrine; I am very certain there is not. And if there be any par-

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ticular expression, which to prejudiced men may seem to import any such thing, every man ought to govern himself in the interpretation of such passages, by what is clear and plain, and agreeable to the main scope and tenor of the Bible, and to those natural notions which men have of God, and of his perfections. For when all is done, this is one of the surest ways of reasoning in religion; and whoever guides himself, and steers by this compass, can never err much: but whoever suffers himself to be led away by the appearance of some more obscure phrases in the expressions of Scripture, and the glosses of men upon them, without regard to this rule, may run into the greatest delusions, may wander eternally, and lose himself in one mistake after another, and shall never find his way out of this endless labyrinth, but by this clue.

If St. James had not been an apostle, the argument which he useth would have convinced any reasonable man, that God tempts no man to sin, because he "cannot be tempted with evil" himself; and therefore it is unreasonable to imagine he should tempt any man. For he argues from such a principle, as all mankind will, at first hearing, assent to.

And thus I have done with the first thing asserted by the apostle here in the text, that God tempts no man to sin; "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man." Before I proceed to the second assertion, that every man is his own greatest tempter, I should draw some useful inferences from what has been already delivered: but I reserve both the one and the other to the next opportunity.

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SERMON CXV.

THE SINS OF MEN NOT CHARGEABLE UPON GOD, BUT UPON THEMSELVES.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.—JAMES i. 13, 14.

WHEN I made entrance upon these words, I told you, that, next to the belief of a God and a providence, nothing is more fundamentally necessary to the practice of a good life than the belief of these two principles—That God is not the author of the sins of men; and that every man's fault lies at his own door. And both these principles St. James does clearly and fully assert in these words.

First, God tempts no man to sin.

Secondly, Every man is his own greatest tempter.

The first of these I have largely spoken to in my former discourse; and from what I then said, I shall only draw a few useful inferences, before I proceed to the second; viz. these which follow.

First, Let us beware of all such doctrines as do any ways tend to make God the author of sin; either by laying a necessity upon men of sinning, or by laying secret designs to tempt and seduce men to sin. Nothing can be farther from the nature of God than to do any such thing, and nothing can be more dishonourable to him than to imagine any

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such thing of him; "he is of purer eyes than to behold evil;" and can we think, that he who cannot endure to see it should have any hand in it? We find that the holy men in Scripture are very careful to remove all thought and suspicion of this from God. Elihu, (Job xxxvi. 3.) before he would argue about God's providence with Job, he resolves, in the first place, to attribute nothing to God that is unworthy of him. "I will (says he,) ascribe righteousness to my Maker." So likewise St. Paul, (Rom. vii. 7.) "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid." "Is the law sin?" that is, hath God given men a law to this end, that he might draw them into sin? Far be it from him. (Gal. ii. 17.) "Is Christ the minister of sin? God forbid."

You see then how tender good men have always been of ascribing any thing to God, that might seem to render him the author of sin. So that we have reason to take heed of all doctrines that are of this tendency: such as are the doctrines of an absolute and irrespective decree to damn the greatest part of mankind; and in order to that, and as a means to it, efficaciously to permit men to sin. For if these things be true, that God hath absolutely decreed to damn the greatest part of men; and, to make good this decree, he permits them to sin, not by a bare permission of leaving them to themselves, but by such a permission as shall be efficacious; that is, he will so permit them to sin as they cannot avoid it: then those who are under this decree of God are under a necessity of sinning, which necessity, since it does not proceed from themselves, but from the decree of God, does by consequence make God the author of sin. And then that other doctrine, which is subservient to this, that God does, by a

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physical and natural influence upon the minds and wills of men, determine them to every action that they do, to bad actions as well as good. I know they who say so tell us, that God only determines men to the action, but not to the evil of it. For instance, when Cain killed his brother, God determined him (they say) to the natural action of taking away a man's life, which in many cases may be done without sin. Very true: but if in these circumstances the natural action could not be done without committing the sin, he that determined him to the natural action determined him likewise to the sin.

I am far from any thought that those that maintain these doctrines had any intention to make God the author of sin: but if this be the necessary consequence of these doctrines, there is reason enough to reject them, how innocent soever the intention be of those who maintain them.

Secondly, Let not us tempt any man to sin. All piety pretends to be an imitation of God; therefore let us endeavour to be like him in this. It is true, indeed, we may be tempted with evil, and therefore we are likely enough to tempt others: but we ought not to do so. It is contrary to holiness and goodness, to the temper and disposition of the most perfect Being in the world. God tempts no man; nay, it is the proper work and employment of the devil, it is his very trade and profession: he goes about seeking whom he may betray into sin and destruction. To this end he walks up and down the earth, waiting all opportunities and advantages upon men to draw them into sin; so that we are his factors and instruments whenever we tempt men to sin.

Let those consider this, who are so active and

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busy to seduce men into any kind of wickedness, and to instruct them in the arts of iniquity; how tempt men into bad company and courses, and take pleasure in debauching a virtuous person, and make it matter of great triumph to make a sober man drunk; as if it were so glorious an action to ruin a soul, and destroy that which is more worth than the whole world. Whenever you go about this work remember whose instruments you are, and whose work you do, and what kind of work it is. Tempting others to sin is in Scripture called murder; for which reason the devil is said to be "a murderer from the beginning," because he was a tempter. "Whosoever committeth sin is of the devil:" but whosoever tempts others to sin is a sort of devil himself.

Thirdly, Since God tempts no man, let us not tempt him. There is frequent mention in Scripture of men's tempting God; *i. e.* trying him, as it were, whether he will do any thing for their sakes, that is misbecoming his goodness, and wisdom, and faithfulness, or any other of his perfections. Thus the Israelites are said to have "tempted God in the wilderness forty years together," and, in that space, more remarkably ten times. The meaning of which expressions is, that when God had promised Abraham to bring his seed into the land of Canaan, that people, by their great and repeated provocations of God, did often provoke him to have destroyed them, and consequently to have failed of the promise which he made to the fathers. The devil likewise tempted our Saviour to tempt God, by casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, in confidence that the angels would take care of him: but our Saviour answers him, "It is written, Thou shalt not

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tempt the Lord thy God." From which instance it appears, that men are said to tempt God, whenever they expect the protection of his providence in an unwarrantable way. God hath promised to take care of good men, but if they neglect themselves or willingly cast themselves into danger, and expect his providence and protection, they do not trust God, but tempt him; they try whether God's providence will countenance their rashness, and provide for them, when they neglect themselves; and protect them from those dangers to which they wilfully expose themselves.

So likewise if we be negligent in our callings, whereby we should provide for our families, if we lavish away that which we should lay up for them, and then depend upon the providence of God to supply them, and take care of them, we tempt God to that which is unworthy of him; which is to give approbation to our folly, and countenance our sloth and carelessness. We cannot seduce God, and draw him to do any thing that misbecomes him, but we tempt him in expecting the care and protection of his providence, when we wilfully run ourselves into danger, and neglect the means of providing for our own safety. And thus I have done with the first great principle contained in the text; viz. That God is not the author of the sins of men. I proceed now to the

Second; That every man is his own greatest tempter. "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed." God does not tempt any man to sin: but every man is then tempted, when by his own lust, his irregular inclination and desire, he is seduced to evil, and enticed; καὶ δελεαζόμενος, is caught, as it were, with a bait, for so the Greek word signifies.

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In which words the apostle gives us a true account of the prevalency and efficacy of temptation upon men. It is not because God has any design to ensnare men in sin; but their own corruption and vicious inclinations seduce them to that which is evil. To instance in the particular temptations the apostle was speaking of, persecution and suffering for the cause of religion, to avoid which, many did then forsake the truth, and apostatize from their Christian profession. The true case of which was not the providence of God, which permitted them to be exposed to those sufferings, but their inordinate love of the good things of this life, and their unreasonable fears of the evils and sufferings of it; they valued the enjoyments of this present life, more than the favour of God, and that eternal happiness which he had promised to them in another life; and they feared the persecutions of men more than the threatenings of God, and the dreadful punishments of another world. They had an inordinate affection for the ease and pleasure of this life, and their unwillingness to part with these, was a great temptation to them to quit their religion; by this bait they were caught, when it came to the trial.

And thus it is proportionably in all other sorts of temptations. Men are betrayed by themselves, and the temptation without hath a party within them, with which it holds a secret correspondence, and which is ready to yield and give consent to it; so that it is our own consent, and treachery to ourselves, that makes any temptation master of us, and without that we are not to be overcome; "every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed." It is the lust of men complying with the temptations which are offered to us, which ren-

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ders them effectual, and gives them the victory over us.

In the handling of this argument, I shall from these words of the apostle observe to you these two things.

First, That as the apostle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to sin, so he does not ascribe the prevalency of temptation to the devil.

Secondly, That he ascribes the prevalency of temptation to the lust and vicious inclinations of men, which seduce them to a compliance with the temptations that are presented to them; "every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed." These two observations shall be the subject of my present discourse.

First, That as the apostle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to sin, so he does not ascribe the prevalency and efficacy of temptation to the devil. That he acquits God, I have shewn, at large, in my former discourse. It is evident, likewise, that he does not ascribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the devil: for the apostle in this discourse of his concerning temptations, makes no express mention of the devil; he supposeth, indeed, that baits are laid for men, "every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed;" *i. e.* when he plays with the baits that are laid for him, and swallows them. And the Scripture elsewhere frequently tells us, that the devil is very active and busy to tempt men, and is continually laying baits before them; but their own lusts are the cause why they are caught by them.

And I do the rather insist upon this, because men are apt to lay great load upon the devil, in the business of temptation, hoping thereby either wholly, or at least in a great measure, to excuse themselves; and

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therefore I shall here consider how far the devil by his temptations is the cause of the sins which men, by compliance with those temptations, are drawn into.

First, It is certain that the devil is very active and busy to minister to them the occasion of sin, and temptations to it. For ever since he fell from God, partly out of enmity to him, and partly out of envy and malice to mankind, he hath made it his great business and employment to seduce men to sin; and to this end he walks up and down the earth, and watcheth all occasions and opportunities to tempt men to sin; and so far as his power reacheth, and God permits him, he lays baits and temptations before them in all their ways, presenting them with the occasions and opportunities to sin, and with such baits and allurements as are most suitable to their tempers, and most likely to prevail with their particular inclinations, and, as often as he can, surprising men with these at the easiest time of access, and with such circumstances, as may give his temptations the greatest force and advantage. Of this the Scripture assures us in general, when it tells us of those wiles and devices of Satan, and of the methods of his temptations; so that though we do not particularly discern how and when he doth this, yet we have no reason to doubt of the thing, if we believe that there is such a spirit in the world, as the Scripture particularly tells us there is, that works in the children of disobedience; and that God, from whom nothing is hid, and who sees all the secret engines which are at work in the world, to do us good or harm, hath in mercy to mankind given us particular warning of it, and that we may not be wholly ignorant of our enemies, and their malicious designs

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upon us, that we may be continually upon our guard, aware of our danger, and armed against it.

Secondly, The devil does not only present to men the temptations and occasions of sin; but when he is permitted to make nearer approaches to them, does excite and stir them up to comply with these temptations, and to yield to them. And this he does, not only by employing his instruments, to solicit for him, and draw men to sin by bad counsel and example, which we see frequently done, and probably very often by the devil's instigation; (those who are very wicked themselves, and consequently more enslaved to the devil, and under his power, being as it were factors for him to seduce others;) but besides this it is not improbable but the devil himself does many times immediately excite men to sin, by working upon the humours of their bodies, or upon their imaginations; and by that means infusing and suggesting evil motions into them; or by diverting them from those thoughts and considerations, which might check and restrain them from that wickedness to which he is tempting them; or by some other ways and means more secret and unknown to us. For the power of spirits, whether good or bad, and the manner of their operation upon our minds, are things very secret, and of which we can give little or no account; but yet for all that, we have many times reason sufficient to believe a thing to be so, when we are wholly ignorant of the manner of it.

And there is reason, from what is said in Scripture, to believe that the devil, in some cases, hath a more immediate power and influence upon the minds of men, to excite them to sin, and, where he discovers a very bad inclination or resolution, to help it forward, and to keep men to it, as when it is said

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(John xiii. 27.) that "the devil entered into Judas," to push him on in that ill design, which he had already engaged in, of betraying our Saviour. And (Acts v. 3.) Satan is said to have "filled the heart of Ananias, to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price" for which he had sold his estate; which expressions do seem to intimate to us, some more immediate power and influence which the devil had upon those persons: but then it is very observable, that this power is never ascribed to the devil, but in the case of great and horrid sins, and where men are beforehand notoriously depraved; and either by the actual commission of some former great sin, or by entertaining some very wicked design, have provoked God to permit the devil a nearer access to them. For Judas had first taken counsel how to betray Christ, before it is said the devil entered into him, to push him on to the execution of it. And Ananias's covetousness had first tempted him to keep back part of his estate, before it is said the devil filled his heart to lie to the Holy Ghost; so that what power the devil hath over men, they first give it him; they consent to his outward temptations, before he can get within them. Hence it is that in Scripture great sinners are described, as being more immediately under the government and influence of the devil. Ephes. ii. 1, 2. where the apostle speaking of those, who from heathenism were converted to Christianity, "You (says he) hath he quickened, who were once dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in times past ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, or unbelief;" τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος, "the spirit that still acts and

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inspires the children of unbelief;" that is, those who continue in their infidelity, and would not believe and obey the gospel. When men are notoriously wicked and disobedient to the counsels of God, the devil is said to act and inspire them, which certainly signifies some more immediate power and influence which he hath over such persons.

For as it is very probable, that the devil is sometimes permitted to come near good men so as to tempt them; so, by notorious wickedness and impiety, men do give admission to him, and he is permitted by the just judgment of God to exercise greater dominion over them. By resisting his temptations, we drive him from us. So St. James tells us, (chap. iv. 7.) "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you:" but as we yield to his temptations, he continually makes nearer approaches to us, and gains a greater power over us.

Thirdly, But for all this the devil can force no man to sin; his temptations may move and excite men to sin, but that they are prevalent and effectual, proceeds from our own will and consent; it is our own lusts closing with his temptations that produce sin. The devil hath more or less power over men, according as they give way to him; but never so much as to force their wills, and to compel them to consent to, and comply with his temptations; the grace of God doth hardly offer this violence to men for their good, in order to their salvation; and therefore much less will he permit the devil to have this power over men to their ruin and destruction. God's commanding us to resist the devil supposeth that his temptations are not irresistible.

Fourthly, From what hath been said, it appears, that though the devil be frequently accessary to the

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sins of men, yet we ourselves are the authors of them; he tempts us many times to sin, but it is we that commit it. His temptations may sometimes be so violent as to extenuate our fault, but never so forcible as wholly to excuse us; for we are so far guilty of sin, as we give our consent to it: and how powerful soever the temptation be to any kind of evil, there is always enough of our own will in it to render us guilty.

I am far from thinking that the devil tempts men to all the evil that they do. I rather think that the greatest part of the wickedness that is committed in the world, springs from the evil motions of men's own minds. Men's own lusts are generally to them the worst devil of the two, and do more strongly incline them to sin, than any devil without them can tempt them to it. It is not to be doubted, that the devil does all the mischief he can to the souls of men, so far as God permits him; and though the number of evil angels be probably very great, yet it is but finite, and every one of them hath a limited power; and though they be very active, yet they can be but one where at once; so that his malice at the utmost does only all the evil that it can, not all that it would; he plies where he has the best custom, where he has the fairest opportunity, and the greatest hopes; he leaves men many times for a season, as (it is said) he did our Saviour, because he despairs of success at that time; and it may be, sometimes when he is gone, these persons grow secure, and through their own security and folly, fall into those sins which the devil, with all his baits and wiles, whilst they were upon their guard, could not tempt them to commit.

Others, after he has made them sure, and put

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them into the way of it, will go on of themselves, and are as mad of sinning, as forward to destroy themselves, as the devil himself could wish; so that he can hardly tempt men to any wickedness, which he does not find them inclined to of themselves. These he can trust with themselves, and leave them to their own inclinations and conduct, finding, by experience, that they will do as ill things of their own motion, as if Satan stood continually at their right hand to prompt them, and put them on, so that he can go into a far country, and employ himself elsewhere, and leave them for a long time; being confident, that in his absence they will not bury their talent, and hide it in a napkin, but will improve it to a great advantage. And I wish that our own age did not afford us too many instances of this kind, of such forward and expert sinners, as need no tempter either to instruct or excite them to that which is evil. Now, in this case, the devil betakes himself to other persons, and removes his snares and baits where he thinks there is more need and occasion for them.

So that we may reasonably conclude, that there is a great deal of wickedness committed in the world, which the devil hath no immediate hand in, though he always rejoiceth in it when it is done; and that there is a great deal more reason to attribute all good to the motions and operations of the Spirit of God, than to ascribe all sin and wickedness in the world to the devil; because the Spirit of God is more powerful, and is always every where, and is more intent upon his design, and as forward to promote it, as the devil can be to carry on his work; nay, I doubt not but he is more active to excite men to good, than the devil can be to tempt them to

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evil. And yet for all this I think there is no great reason to doubt, but that good men do many good actions of their own inclination, without any special and immediate motion from the Spirit of God. They are, indeed, at first regenerate, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and are continually afterwards under the conduct of the same Spirit: but where there is a new nature, it is of itself inclinable to that which is good, and will bring forth fruits, and do actions answerable. Much less do I think that the devil tempts every man to all the evil that he does, or the greatest part. When the lusts of men, and the habits of vice are grown strong and confirmed, the devil may spare his temptations in a great measure; for after bad men are wound to such a pitch of impiety, they will go a great while of themselves.

I have done with the first observation; that as the apostle acquits God from having any hand in tempting men to sin, so neither does he ascribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the devil. I proceed to the

Second observation, That he ascribes the efficacy and success of temptation to the lusts and vicious inclinations of men, which seduce them to a consent and compliance with the temptations which are afforded to them. "Every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed." We have many powerful enemies; but we are much more in danger of treachery from within, than of assaults from without. All the power of our enemies could not destroy us if we were but true to ourselves; so that the apostle had great reason to ascribe the efficacy of temptation, to the irregular desires and vicious inclinations of men, rather than to those temptations which the providence of God permits them

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to be assaulted with, and consequently to lay the blame of men's sins chiefly upon themselves.

And that chiefly upon these two accounts:

First, Because the lusts of men are in a great measure voluntary.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to resist those temptations, and overcome them. Now, so far as the lusts of men are voluntary, it is their own fault that they are seduced by them; and if God hath put it in our power to resist and overcome temptations, we may blame ourselves if we be overcome and foiled by them.

First, The lusts of men are in a great measure voluntary. By the lusts of men, I mean their irregular desires and vicious inclinations. I grant that the nature of man is very much corrupted, and degenerated from its primitive integrity and perfection: but we who are Christians, have received that grace in baptism, whereby our natures are so far healed, as, if we be not wanting to ourselves, and do not neglect the means which God hath appointed to us, we may mortify our lusts, and live a new life: so that if our lusts remain unmortified, we ourselves are in fault, much more if they gain new strength, and proceed to habits; for this could not be, if we did not, after we come to age, and are able to discern between and to choose good and evil, voluntarily consent to iniquity, and, by wilful and deliberate practice of known sins, improve the evil inclinations of our nature into vicious habits: but if, instead of mortifying and subduing the evil propensions of our nature (which is no very difficult work to most persons, if they begin it betimes), we will cherish and give new life and power to them, we forfeit the grace which we received in baptism, and bring our-

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selves again under the power and dominion of sin; and no wonder then if our lusts seduce us, and make us ready to comply with the temptations of the world and the devil.

Nay, and after this it is still our own fault if we do not mortify our lusts; for if we would hearken to the counsel of God, and obey his calls to repentance, and sincerely beg his grace and Holy Spirit to this purpose, we might yet recover ourselves, and "by the Spirit mortify the deeds of the flesh;" for though we have left God, he hath not quite forsaken us, but is ready to afford his grace again to us, though we have neglected and abused it, and to give his Holy Spirit to those that ask him, though we have forfeited it; so that though our lusts spring from something which is natural, yet that they live and have dominion over us is voluntary, because we might remedy it if we would, and make use of those means which God in the gospel offers to us.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to resist these temptations, and overcome them; so that it is our own fault if we yield to them, and be overcome by them.

It is naturally in our power to resist many sorts of temptations; and the grace of God, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to ourselves, puts it in our power to resist any temptation that may happen to us.

First, It is naturally in our power to resist many sorts of temptations. If we do but make use of our natural reason, and those considerations which are common and obvious to men, we may easily resist the temptations to a great many sins. Some sins are so horrid in their nature, that when we have the strongest temptations to them, we cannot but have

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a natural aversion from them; as deliberate murder, the danger and guilt whereof are both so great, as make it easy for any considerate man to resist the strongest temptation to it, even that of revenge. A plain act of injustice, whether by great fraud, or by downright oppression, is so base and disgraceful, so odious and abhorred by human nature, that it is not difficult to a man that hath but a common understanding and common inclination to be honest, to overcome the greatest temptation of gain and advantage; nay, he must offer considerable violence to his nature and reason, to bring himself to it at first. Profaneness and contempt of God and religion is so monstrous a fault, and of so dreadful an appearance, that every man that will but use his reason can have no temptation to it, either from gratifying his humour, or pleasing his company, or shewing his wit, that can be of equal force with the arguments which every man's mind and conscience is apt to suggest to him against it.

Nay, there are many sins much inferior to these, the temptations whereto may, by the ordinary reasons and considerations of prudence and interest, be baffled and put out of countenance. To instance in common swearing, to which I think there is no temptation, either from pleasure or advantage, but only from fashion and custom. Now this temptation is easy to be conquered, by considering that every man that professeth to believe the Bible, must acknowledge it to be a sin; and if any man be convinced that it is a sin, I dare undertake to convince him that he can leave it. He that can choose, at any time, whether he will speak or not (which it is certainly in every man's power to do) can choose whether he will swear when he speaks. If he says he

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does it by custom and habit, and when he does not think of it; a very little care and resolution will, in a short time, cure any man of that custom; so that it is naturally in every man's power to break off this sin.

Secondly, The grace of God puts it into our power, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to ourselves, to resist any temptation that may happen to us; and what the grace of God puts into our power, is as truly in our power as what we can do ourselves. God offers his grace to every man under the gospel, for he has promised to "give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him;" and it is naturally in every man's power to ask it, otherwise the promise signifies nothing; or if no man can ask the Spirit of God till he first have it, then to promise it to them that ask it is to promise it to them who have it already, and then it is needless to ask it. And if God offers his grace to every man, then it is every man's fault if he have it not; and every man that hath it may, by the ordinary assistance of that grace, resist any ordinary temptation. And if, at any time, God suffers good men to be assaulted, he hath promised in such cases an extraordinary grace and assistance: and that either he will "not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able," or that with the temptation he will find a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.

And thus I have done with the second thing I propounded to speak to from these words: That every man is his own greatest tempter. "Every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed." And now the proper inferences from what I have been all this while discoursing to you are these three:—

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First, Not to think to excuse ourselves by laying the blame of our sins upon the temptation of the devil. That the devil tempts us is not our fault, because we cannot help it; but it is our voluntary compliance with his temptations, our consenting to that evil which he solicits us to, which maketh us guilty, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust;" the lusts of our own hearts give the efficacy to the temptations of the devil: men many times sin upon the motions and suggestions of the devil; but though he be guilty of tempting us, we are guilty of consenting to his temptations.

Many times we are not sure that the devil tempts us to such a sin, but we are sure that we commit it, and consequently that we are guilty of it. Nay, it is certain if there were no devil many would be wicked, and, perhaps, not much less wicked than they are. The lusts and vicious inclinations of men would yield to the temptations of the world, though there were none to manage them, and to set them on to the greatest advantage; so that we cannot excuse our faults upon this account, that we are tempted by the devil. If this were a sufficient excuse for us, the devil would take no pleasure in tempting us; the whole design of his temptation being to make us guilty, and by the guilt of sin to make us miserable.

Secondly, From hence we learn what reason we have to pray to God, that he would "not lead us into temptation," *i. e.* not permit us to fall into it; for, in the phrase of Scripture, God is many times said to do those things, which his providence permits to be done. The best of us have some remainders of lust, some irregular desires and appe-

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tites, which will be apt to betray us to sin, when powerful temptations are presented to us; so that it is a great happiness to the best of men to be kept, by the providence of God, out of the way of violent temptations; for our own strength to resist them is but small, and we are apt to be secure, and to neglect our guard; we are easy to be surprised, and in continual danger through our own weakness or carelessness. Our greatest security is, if we be sincere, and heartily desirous to do well, and firmly resolved against sin, and do depend upon God for his grace and assistance, that his providence will not suffer us to fall into the hands of dangerous and violent temptations, which probably would be too hard for us; he who knows what our strength is, "will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able."

Thirdly, From hence we may learn the best way to disarm temptations, and to take away the power of them; and that is, by mortifying our lusts, and subduing our vicious inclinations. When this is done (which by the grace of God may be done), temptation hath lost its greatest advantage upon us. It is the conspiracy of our lusts, with the temptations that set upon us, that betrays us into their power. The true reason why men fall into sin, is not because they are tempted, but because there is something within them which inclines and disposes them to comply with the temptation and to yield to it. It is said, when the devil came to our Saviour to tempt him, that "he found nothing in him," and therefore his temptations had no force upon him. The more we mortify our lusts, the less the devil will find in us, for his temptations to work upon. Every spark is dangerous when it falls upon com-

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bustible matter; but though sparks fly never so thick there is no danger, so long as there is nothing about us to catch fire.

If we will not be drawn aside and enticed to sin, let us mortify our lusts; for, so far as we are mortified, we are out of the power of temptation.

Men are apt to complain of temptations, that they are too hard for them, and that they are not able to resist them, though they pray to God continually for his grace to that purpose. This, indeed, is one means very proper and necessary to be used; but this is not all that we are to do; we must break off habits of sin, and subdue our lusts, and keep under our inclinations, and then we shall find ourselves able to resist and encounter temptations with more success. And till we do this, in vain do we pray for God's grace, and depend upon him for strength to overcome the temptations that do assault us; for God's grace was never designed to countenance the sloth and negligence of men, but to encourage and second our resolutions and endeavours of well-doing. If we expect God's grace and assistance upon other terms, we tempt God, and provoke him to leave us to the power of temptations, to be drawn away and enticed by our own lusts.

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SERMON CXVI.

PROVING JESUS TO BE THE MESSIAS.

Now, when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them: and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.—MATT. xi. 2—6.

ABOUT the time of our Saviour's appearing in the world, there was a general expectation of a great Prince that should come out of Judea, and govern all nations: this the gentiles had from the prophecies of the sybils, which speak of a great King that was to appear in the world about that time. So Virgil tells us, that the time of Augustus was the utmost date of that prophecy:

Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas:

And Suetonius tells us, that "all over the eastern countries there was an ancient and constant tradition, that such a Prince should spring out of Judea:" and for this reason it is, that our Saviour is called by the prophet, "the expectation of the nations."

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But more especially among the Jews, there was, at that time, a more lively and particular expectation, grounded upon the predictions of the prophets, of a Prince whom they called the Messias, or the anointed; and those who were more devout among them, did at that time wait for his appearance; as it is said of Simeon, that "he waited for the consolation of Israel." Hence it was, that when John the Baptist appeared in the quality of an extraordinary prophet, they sent from Jerusalem to inquire whether he were the Messias: (John i. 19.) "The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ." The Sanhedrin, to whom it belonged to judge who were the true prophets, sent to know whether he was the Messias or not? he would not take this honour to himself; but told them, the Messias was just at hand; and the next day, when Jesus came to be baptized of him, he bare record, that he was the Son of God, and that he saw the Spirit descending and abiding upon him.

So that it is plain that he knew him, and bare witness of him; which makes it the more strange, that, here in the text, he should send two of his disciples to inquire, whether he were the Messias or not: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" that is, art thou the Messias, or not? for so he is called in the ancient prophecies of him, ὁ ἐρχόμενος, *he that should come.* (Gen. xlix. 10.) "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, till Shiloh come."

For the resolution of this difficulty, it is very probably said by interpreters, and I think there is no reason to doubt of it, that John the Baptist did not send this message for his own satisfaction, but to

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satisfy his disciples, who were never very willing to acknowledge Jesus for the Messias, because they thought he did shadow and cloud their master. From whence we may take notice how men's judgments are apt to be perverted by faction and interest; and that good men are too prone to be swayed thereby; for such we suppose the disciples of John to have been: they will not believe their own master, when they apprehend him to speak against their interest; for they knew that they must rise and fall in their reputation and esteem, as their master did. They believed that their master was a prophet, and came from God; yet, for all that, they could not digest his testimony of Christ; because that set him above their master; which they were sagacious enough to perceive, that it tended to the diminution and lessening of themselves. And that this was the thing which troubled them, appears plainly from the complaint which they make to their master; (John iii. 26.) "The disciples of John came to him and said, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." This troubled them, to see him invade their master's office, and that he began to have more followers than John had; he "baptizeth, and all men come to him."

This prejudice John had endeavoured to root out of their minds, by telling them, that he had always declared he was not the Messias: (ver. 28.) "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him." But when he perceived it still to stick with them, and that they observed all his actions, and the miracles that he wrought, as if they had a mind to pick a quarrel

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with him (for St. Luke, who relates the same story, tells us, that when our Saviour had healed the centurion's servant, and raised from the dead the widow's son at Naim, the disciples of John shewed him all these things); I say, John the Baptist, perceiving that they watched him so narrowly, sent two of his disciples to him, that they might receive full satisfaction from him.

And St. Luke tells us, that, upon their coming to him, he wrought many of his miracles before them, to convince them that he was the true Messias. (Luke vii. 21, 22.) "And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil spirits; and to many that were blind he gave sight;" and then said to the disciples of John, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and to the poor the gospel is preached; and blessed is he that is not offended in me."

So that you see that the reason why John the Baptist sent to our Saviour to know whether he was the Messias, was not to satisfy himself, for he had no doubt of it; but perceiving his disciples to be ill-affected towards our Saviour, and hearing them speak with some envy of his miracles, he sent them to him, that, by seeing what he did, and hearing what account he gave of himself, they might receive full satisfaction concerning him.

I have been the longer in the clearing of this, that men, upon every appearance of contradiction in the evangelical history, may not be too forward to suspect the truth of it; but may be convinced, that if they would but have patience to examine things carefully, they would find that the story does sufficiently

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vindicate itself; and though it be penned with great simplicity, yet there is sufficient care taken to free it from being guilty of any contradiction to itself.

The occasion of the words being thus cleared, there are in them these two things considerable:

First, What it was that John the Baptist sent his disciples to be satisfied about; and that was, whether he was the Messias or not? "Now, when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples." The circumstance of his being in prison, seems to be mentioned, to intimate to us the reason why he did not come himself along with them; he sent two of his disciples to him, who said unto him, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" And then,

Secondly, The answer which our Saviour returns to this message: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again the things which ye do see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them: and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

So that these words contain, first, the evidence which our Saviour gives of his being the true Messias; secondly, an intimation, that, notwithstanding all this evidence which he gave of himself, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him; "blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me."

First, The evidence which our Saviour gives of his being the true Messias; and to prove this, there were but two things necessary:

1. To shew that he was sent by God, and had a particular commission from him.

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2. That he was the very person of whom the prophets foretold that he should be the Messias.

The first of these he proves by the miracles which he wrought; and the second by the correspondency of the things he did, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the Messias; the prophecies concerning the Messias were accomplished in him.

First, By the miracles which he wrought; "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; and the dead are raised up." Here is a brief enumeration of miracles which our Saviour wrought; and these were a testimony to him that he came from God, and was sent and commissioned by him to declare his will to the world. So he himself tells us: (John v. 36.) "I have a greater witness than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." Upon the evidence of these miracles, Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews, was convinced that he was sent by God: (John iii. 2.) "We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Nay, his greatest enemies were afraid of his miracles, knowing how proper an argument they are to convince men. John xi. 47, when the chief priests and pharisees were met together in council against him, they concluded, that if he were permitted to go on and work miracles, he would draw all men after him: "What do we? (say they) for this man doeth many miracles; if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him." This they said upon occasion of the great miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

And, in reason, miracles are the highest attesta-

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tion that can be given to the truth and divinity of any doctrine; and supposing a doctrine not to be plainly unworthy of God, and contrary to those natural notions which men have of God and religion, we can have no greater evidence of the truth of it than miracles; they are such an argument as, in its own nature, is apt to persuade and induce belief.

All truths do not need miracles; some are of easy belief, and are so clear by their own light, that they need neither miracle nor demonstration to prove them. Such are those self-evident principles which mankind do generally agree in: others, which are not so evident by their own light, we are content to receive upon clear demonstration of them, or very probable arguments for them, without a miracle. And there are some truths which, however they may be sufficiently obscure and uncertain to most men, yet are they so inconsiderable, and of so small consequence, as not to deserve the attestation of miracles; so that there is no reason to expect that God should interpose by a miracle to convince men of them.

> *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus*
> *Inciderit.*

But for such truths as are necessary to be known by us, but are not sufficiently evident of themselves, nor capable of cogent evidence, especially to prejudiced and interested persons, God is pleased, in this case, many times to work miracles for our conviction; and they are a proper argument to convince us of a thing that is either in itself obscure and hard to be believed, or which we are prejudiced against, and hardly brought to believe; for they are an argument *a majori ad minus*; they prove

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a thing which is obscure and hard to be believed, by something that is more incredible, which yet they cannot deny because they see it done. Thus our Saviour proves himself to be an extraordinary person, by doing such things as never man did; he convinceth them, that they ought to believe what he said, because they saw him do those things, which were harder to be believed (if one had not seen them) than what he said.

Miracles are, indeed, the greatest external confirmation and evidence that can be given to the truth of any doctrine; and where they are wrought with all the advantages they are capable of, they are an unquestionable demonstration of the truth of it: and such were our Saviour's miracles here in the text, to prove that he was the true Messias; here are miracles of all kinds; "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; and the dead are raised up." For the nature of them, they are such as are most likely to be Divine, and to come from God, for they were healing and beneficial to mankind. Our Saviour here instanceth in those things which are of greatest benefit and advantage, and which free men from the greatest miseries and inconveniences; the restoring of sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf; soundness and health to the lame and the leprous; and life to the dead. And then for the number of them, they were many; not one instance of a kind, but several of every kind, and great multitudes of most of them; and for the manner of their operation, they were public, in the sight and view of great multitudes of people, to free them from all suspicion of fraud and imposture; they were not wrought privately and in cor-

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ners, and given out and noised abroad, but before all the people, so that every one might see them, and judge of them; not only among his own disciples and followers, as the church of Rome pretends to work theirs, but among his enemies, to convince those that did not believe; and this not done once, and in one place, but at several times, and in all places where he came, and for a long time, for three years and a half; and, after his death, he endowed his disciples and followers with the same power, which lasted for some ages. And then for the quality of them, they were miracles of the greatest magnitude; those of them, which in themselves might have been performed by natural means, as healing the lame, and the leprous, and the deaf, he did in a miraculous manner, by a word or a touch, yea, and many times at a great distance. But others were, not only in the manner of their operation, but in the nature of the thing, unquestionably miraculous; as, giving of sight to those that had been born blind, and raising up the dead to life, as Lazarus, after he had lain in the grave four days; and himself afterwards, the third day after he had been buried; which, if there ever was or can be any unquestionable miracles in the world, ought certainly to be reputed such. So that our blessed Saviour had all the attestation that miracles can give, that he came from God. And this is the first evidence of his being the Messias.

The Jews acknowledge that the Messias, when he comes, shall work great miracles; their own Talmud confesseth, that Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, did work great miracles; and the history of the gospel does particularly relate more and greater miracles wrought by him, than by Moses and all

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the prophets that had been since the world began; so that we may still put the same question to the Jews, which they did in our Saviour's time to one another; "When Christ cometh," when the Messias whom ye expect comes, "will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?"

But, secondly, this will yet more clearly appear by the correspondency of the things here mentioned, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the Messias.

Not to mention innumerable circumstances of his birth, and life, and death, and resurrection, and ascension into heaven, together with the success and prevalency of his doctrine in the world, all which are punctually foretold by some or other of the prophets; I shall confine myself to the particulars here in the text.

First, It was foretold of the Messias, that he should work miraculous cures. Isa. xxxv. 4—6. speaking of the Messias, "He will come and save you; then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing;" this you see was fulfilled here in the text. It is true, indeed, the text mentions another miracle which is not in the prophet, that he raised the dead; but if God did more than he promised and foretold, this is no prejudice to the argument, if all that he foretold was accomplished in him. Besides, the Jews have a proverb, that God is not content to perform barely what he promiseth, but he usually doth something over and above his promise. That the Messias should heal the blind, and the deaf, and the lame, Isaiah prophesied; and God makes good this promise and prediction to the

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full; the Messias did not only do these, but, which is more and greater than any of these, he raised the dead to life.

Secondly, It was likewise foretold of the Messias, that he should preach the gospel to the poor: (Isa. lxi. 1.) "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek;" εὐαγγελίζεσθαι πτωχοῖς, "to preach the gospel, or good tidings to the poor:" so the LXXII. render the words; and they are the very words used by our Saviour here in the text. It is true, indeed, this was no miracle; but it was the punctual accomplishment of a prophecy concerning the Messias, and consequently an evidence that he was the Messias. But, besides, it had something in it which was very strange to the Jews, and very different from the way of their doctors and teachers; for the rabbies among the Jews would scarce instruct any but for great reward; they would meddle with none but those that were able to requite their pains; the ordinary and poorer sort of people they had in great contempt, as appears by that slighting expression of them, (John vii. 48, 49.) "Have any of the rulers or of the pharisees believed on him? but this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." And Grotius upon this text tells us, that the Jewish masters had this foolish and insolent proverb among them, that "the Spirit of God doth not rest but upon a rich man;" to which this prediction concerning the Messias was a direct contradiction: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." In old time, the prophets were especially sent to the kings and princes of the people; but this great prophet comes to "preach the gospel

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to the poor." None have so little reason to be proud as the sons of men, but never was any so humble as the Son of God; our Saviour's whole life and doctrine was a contradiction to the false opinions of the world; they thought the rich and great men of the world the only happy persons; but he came "to preach glad tidings to the poor," to bring good news to them whom the great doctors of the law despised and set at nought; and therefore, to confound their pride and folly, and to confute their false opinions of things, he begins that excellent sermon of his with this saying, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

Thirdly, It was foretold of the Messias, that the world should be offended at him: (Isa. viii. 14.) "He shall be for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence, to both the houses of Israel." And, (Isa. liii. 1—3.) "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him; he is despised and rejected of men, and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not;" and this likewise is intimated in the last words of the text, "and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." Intimating, that, notwithstanding the great works that he did among them, which testified of him that he came from God; notwithstanding the predictions of their prophets concerning the Messias were so clearly and punctually accomplished in him; yet, notwithstanding all this, they would take offence at him upon one account or other, and reject him and his doctrine: but even this, that they rejected him, and would not own him for the Messias, was another sign or evidence that

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he was the true Messias foretold by the prophets: for, among other things, this was expressly predicted concerning him, that he should be despised and rejected of men.

And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to speak to; namely, the evidence which our Saviour here gives of his being the true Messias.

First, The many and great miracles which he wrought, prove that he came from God. And,

Secondly, The correspondence of the things he did, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the Messias, declare him to be the true Messias.

I now proceed to the next thing I propounded to speak to; namely,

Secondly, An intimation in the text, that, notwithstanding all the evidence Christ gave of himself, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him, and his doctrine. In speaking to which, it will be very proper to consider,

First, How the poor came to be more disposed to receive the gospel than others.

Secondly, What those prejudices are which the world had against our Saviour and his religion at its first appearance, as also those which men have at this day against the Christian religion, and to endeavour to shew the unreasonableness of them.

Thirdly, How happy a thing it is to escape and overcome the common prejudices which men have against religion.

First, How the poor came to be more disposed to receive the gospel than others: "The poor have the gospel preached unto them." Which does not only signify that our Saviour did more especially apply himself to them, but likewise that they were

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in a nearer disposition to receive it, and did, of all others, give the most ready entertainment to his doctrine: and this our Saviour declares to us in the beginning of his sermon upon the Mount, when he pronounceth the poor blessed upon this account, because they were nearer to the kingdom of God than others; "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God." So likewise St. James; (chap. ii. 5.) "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him?" So that it seems the poor were, upon some account or other, in a nearer disposition to receive the gospel, than the great and rich men of this world. And of this there are three accounts to be given.

First, The poor had no earthly interest to engage them to reject our Saviour and his doctrine. The high-priests, and scribes, and pharisees, among the Jews, they had a plain worldly interest which did engage them to oppose our Saviour and his doctrine; for if he were received for the Messias, and his doctrine embraced, they must of necessity lose their sway and authority among the people; and all that which rendered them so considerable, their pretended skill in the law, and in the traditions and observances of their fathers, together with their external shows of piety and devotion, would signify nothing, if our Saviour and his doctrine should take place. And there are very few so honest and sincere, as to be content, for truth's sake, to part with their reputation and authority, and to become less in the esteem of men than they were before. Few are so impartial as to quit those things which they have once laid great weight upon, and kept a great stir about; because this is to acknowledge

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that they were in an error, and mistaken in their zeal, which few have the ingenuity to own, though it be never so plain to others; and, therefore, it is no wonder, that our Saviour's doctrine met with so much resistance from those, who were so much concerned, in point of honour and reputation, to make head against it. And this account our Saviour himself gives of their infidelity: (John v. 44.) "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?" and, (chap. xii. 43.) "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

And, besides the point of reputation, those that were rich were concerned in point of interest to oppose our Saviour and his doctrine; because he called upon men to deny themselves, and to part with houses and lands, yea, and life itself, for his sake, and for the gospel's, which must needs be a very hard and unpleasant doctrine to rich men, who had great estates, and had set their hearts upon them. Upon this account it is, that our Saviour pronounceth it so hard "for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God;" and compares it with those things that are most difficult, and humanly impossible; "I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

But now the poor were free from these encumbrances and temptations; they had nothing to lose, and therefore our Saviour's doctrine went down more easily with them; because it did not contradict their interest, as it did the interest of those who had great estates and possessions.

Secondly, Another reason of this is, that those that are poor, and enjoy little of the good things of

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this life, are willing to entertain good news of happiness in another. Those who are in a state of present misery and suffering, are glad to hear that it shall be well with them hereafter, and are willing to listen to the good news of a future happiness; and therefore our Saviour, when he had pronounced the poor blessed, (Luke vi. 20.) adds, by way of opposition, (ver. 24.) "But woe unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation." They were in so comfortable a condition at present, that they were not much concerned what should become of them hereafter; whereas all the comfort that poor men have, is the hopes of a better condition, *non si male nunc, et olim sic erit*, that "if it be bad now, it will not be so always;" and therefore, no wonder if the promises and assurance of a future happiness be very welcome to them.

Thirdly, If by the poor we do not only understand those who are in a low and mean condition as to the things of this world, but such, likewise, as had a temper and disposition of mind suitable to the poverty of their outward condition, which our Saviour calls poverty of spirit, by which he means meekness and humility; there is no doubt but that such a frame and temper of spirit is a great disposition to the receiving of truth. And that this is included in the notion of poverty, is very plain, both from the words of the prophecy I cited before, (Isa. lxi. 1.) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, and to bind up the broken-hearted;" and likewise from our Saviour's description of these persons, in one of the evangelists; (Matt. v. 3.) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." So that, by the poor,

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who are so nearly disposed to receive the gospel, our Saviour intended those, who, being in a poor and low condition in respect of outward things, were likewise meek and humble in their spirits. Now meekness and humility are great dispositions to the entertaining of truth. These graces and virtues do prepare the minds of men for learning and instruction; meekness, and modesty, and humility, are the proper dispositions of a scholar. He that hath a mean opinion of himself is ready to learn of others; he who is not blinded by pride, or passion, is more apt to consider things impartially, and to pass a truer judgment upon them, than the proud and the passionate. Passion and pride are great obstacles to the receiving of truth, and to our improvement in knowledge. Passion does not only darken the minds of men, but puts a false bias upon our judgments, which draws them off many times from truth, and sways them that way to which our passion inclines them. A man of a calm and meek temper stands always indifferent for the receiving of truth, and holds the balance of his judgment even; but passion sways and inclines it one way, and that commonly against truth and reason. So, likewise, pride is a impediment to knowledge, and the very worst quality that a learner can have; it obstructs all the passages whereby knowledge should enter into us, it makes men refuse instruction, out of a conceit they need it not. Many men might have known more, had it not been for the vain opinion which they have entertained of the sufficiency of their knowledge. This is true in all kinds of learning, but more especially as to the knowledge of Divine things. For God loves to communicate himself, and bestow his grace and wisdom upon

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meek and humble minds. So the Scripture tells us, (Psal. xxv. 9.) "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways." And, (1 Pet. v. 5.) "Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

And thus I have shewn in what respects the poor were more disposed for the receiving the gospel than others. I proceed now, to the

Second thing; namely, What those prejudices and objections are, which the world had against our Saviour and his religion at their first appearance; as also to inquire into those which men have at this day against the Christian religion, and to shew the weakness and unreasonableness of them. I begin,

First, With those prejudices which the world had against our Saviour and his religion, at their first appearance.

Both Jews and gentiles were offended at him and his doctrine; but not both upon the same account. They both took exceptions at him, especially at his low and suffering condition; but not both upon the same reason. I shall begin with the exceptions which the Jews took against our blessed Saviour and his religion; and I shall reduce them all, or at least the most considerable of them (as I find them dispersed in the history of the gospel, and in the Acts of the Apostles) to these six heads:

First, The exceptions which they took against him upon account of his extraction and original.

Secondly, At the meanness of his condition, contrary to their universal expectation.

Thirdly, As to his miracles.

Fourthly, His conversation.

Fifthly, The prejudice that lay against him from

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the opposition that was made by persons of greatest knowledge and authority among them. And,

Lastly, That the religion which he endeavoured to introduce, did abolish and supersede their ancient religion, as of no longer use and continuance, though it was plain it was at first instituted by God.

First, The exceptions which they took at his extraction and original. In relation to this they were offended at three things.

1. That his original was known among them. This you find urged against him, John vii. 27, "We know this man whence he is; but when the Messias comes, no man knows whence he is."

This, to be sure, was no just exception in reason against him. For what if his extraction were known, might he not be from God for all that? They owned Moses for the greatest prophet that ever was, and yet it was very well known from whence he was.

But they seem to refer to some prophecy of the Old Testament, which did seem to assert so much. If they meant that his extraction should be altogether unknown, they knew very well, and believed the contrary, that he was to be of the line of David, and to come out of Bethlehem. If they referred to that prophecy, that "a virgin should conceive and bear a son," and so understood that he should be without father, this was really true, though they thought that he was the son of Joseph. And if he affirmed that he had no father, he did sufficiently justify it by his miracles; that being as easy to be believed possible by a Divine power, as the miracles which he wrought; which yet they could not deny, because they saw them.

2. Another prejudice against his extraction, was

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the meanness of his parents and breeding. This you find mentioned, Matt. xiii. 54, 55. "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? whence then hath this man these things? And they were offended in him." And so, likewise, John vii. 15. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?"

A strange prejudice, and most unreasonable. They could not believe him to be an extraordinary person, because his parents and relations, his birth and breeding, were so mean. He had been brought up to a trade, and not brought up to learning: whereas, in reason, this ought to have been an argument just the other way; that he was an extraordinary person, and divinely assisted, who all on the sudden, without the help and assistance of education, gave such evidence of his great wisdom and knowledge, and did such mighty works. This could not be imputed to his breeding, for that was mean; therefore, there must be something extraordinary and Divine in it. Thus another man, who had been free from prejudice, would have reasoned.

3. The most unreasonable prejudice of all, in respect of his extraction, was grounded upon a spiteful and malicious proverb, concerning the country where our Saviour was brought up, and they supposed him to be born; and that was Galilee: (John i. 46.) "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" and, (John vii. 41.) "Shall the Messias come out of Galilee?" and, (ver. 52.) "Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

But it seems Nathanael, who was a good man, was

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easily taken off from this common prejudice, when Philip said to him, "Come and see." He bids him come and see the works he did, and then refers it to him, whether he would believe his own eyes, or an old proverb: however, it seems the Jews laid great weight upon it, as if this alone were enough to confute all his miracles; and, after they had shot this bolt at him, the business was concluded clearly against him. But prudent and considerate men do not use to give much credit to ill-natured proverbs; the good or bad characters which are given of countries are not understood to be universally true, and without exception. There is no place but hath brought forth some brave spirits and excellent persons, whatever the general temper and disposition of the inhabitants may be. Among the Grecians, the Bœotians were esteemed a dull people, even to a proverb; and yet Pindar, one of their chief poets, was one of them. The Scythians were a barbarous nation, and one would have thought no good could have come from thence; and yet that country yielded Anacharsis, an eminent philosopher. The Idumeans were aliens and strangers to the covenant; and yet Job, one of the best men that ever was, came from thence. God can raise up eminent persons from any place; Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and an idolatrous people. Nay, as our Saviour tells us, "he can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham." The wise God, in the government of the world, does not tie himself to our foolish proverbs. It is not necessary, to make a man a prophet, that he should be bred in a good air. If God sends a man, it matters not from what place he comes.

Secondly, Another head of exception against

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our Saviour, was the meanness of his outward condition, so contrary to the universal expectation of the Jews. The Jews, from the tradition of their fathers, to which they (as the church of Rome does at this day) paid a greater reverence than to the written word of God, were possessed with a strong persuasion, that the Messias whom they expected was to be a great prince and conqueror, and to subdue all nations to them; so that nothing could be a greater defeat to their expectations, than the mean and low condition in which our Saviour appeared; so that, upon this account, they were almost universally offended at him.

But this prejudice was very unreasonable. For neither did their prophets foretel any such thing as the temporal greatness of the Messias: but, on the contrary, most expressly, that "he should be despised and rejected of men," that he should be "a man of sorrows" and sufferings, and at last be put to death; which was directly contrary to what they expected from their ill-grounded tradition.

Thirdly, Against his miracles they made these two exceptions:

1. That he wrought them by magical skill, and by the power of the devil.

Which was so exorbitantly unreasonable and malicious, that our Saviour pronounceth it to be an unpardonable sin; and, for answer to it, appeals to every man's reason, whether it was likely that the devil should conspire against himself, and assist any man to overthrow his own kingdom? For it was plain our Saviour's doctrine was directly contrary to the devil's design; and, therefore, to assist him to work miracles for the confirmation of it,

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must have been apparently against his own interest, and to the ruin of his own kingdom.

2. They pretended, that though he did many great works, yet he gave them no sign from heaven. Matt. xvi. 1, it is said, "They desired him to shew them a sign from heaven." It seems they expected that God should give some immediate testimony to him from heaven; as he did to Elias, when fire came down from heaven, and consumed his enemies; and particularly they expected, that, when he was upon the cross, if he were the true Messias, he should have come down and saved himself. And because he did not answer their expectation in this, they concluded him an impostor.

Now what could be more unreasonable, when he had wrought so many other and great miracles, perversely to insist upon some particular kind of miracle which they fancied? as if God were bound to gratify the curiosity of men; and as if our Saviour were not as much declared to be the Son of God, by rising again from the dead, as if he had come down from the cross.

Fourthly, As to his conversation, they had these three exceptions:

1. That he used no severity in his habit or diet; took too much freedom, as they thought; came eating and drinking; that is, he freely used the creatures of God for the end for which they were given, with temperance and thanksgiving; and did not lay those rigorous restraints upon himself in these matters, which many that were esteemed the most religious among them used to do.

But he plainly shews them that this exception was merely out of their prejudice against him. For if he

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had come in the way of austerity, they would have objected to him as well. They were resolved to find fault with him, whatever he did. (Matt. xi. 16.) "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he hath a devil." He lived in a more austere and melancholy way, "he came in the way of righteousness," used great strictness and severity in his habit and diet, and this they took exception at. Our Saviour was of a quite contrary temper, and that did not please them neither. "The Son of man came eating and drinking; and they say, Behold a wine-bibber and a glutton." So that let our Saviour have done what he would, he could not have carried himself so as to have escaped the censures of men so peevishly and perversely disposed.

2. That he kept company with publicans and sinners.

To which exception nothing can be more reasonable than our Saviour's own answer; that he was sent to be a physician to the world, "to call sinners to repentance;" and therefore, they had no reason to be angry, or think it strange, if he conversed with his patients, among whom his proper employment lay.

3. They objected to him profaneness in breaking the sabbath; and that surely was plain, that he could not be of God, if he kept not the sabbath-day. The truth was, he had healed one on the sabbath-day.

To this our Saviour gives a most reasonable and satisfactory answer, that surely "it was lawful to do good on the sabbath-day;" that that was but a positive institution, but works of mercy are natural and moral duties; and God himself had declared, that he would have even his own institutions to give

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way to those greater duties, that are of natural and eternal obligation. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." And then from the end of the sabbath; the sabbath was made for the rest and refreshment of man; and therefore could not be presumed to be intended to his prejudice. "The sabbath was made for man: and not man for the sabbath."

Fifthly, Another great prejudice against him, was, that persons of the greatest knowledge and authority among them did not embrace his doctrine. (John vii. 48.) "Have any of the rulers or pharisees believed on him?" So that here was the infallible rule and authority of their church against him.

There is no doubt but the example and authority of our guides ought to sway very much with us, and overrule us in doubtful cases, but not against plain and convincing evidence; there we ought to follow "and obey God rather than men." There is sometimes a visible and palpable corruption in those who are to lead us; they may have an interest to oppose the truth: and thus it was with the pharisees and rulers at that time; and so it hath been among Christians in the great degeneracy of the Roman church. The Christian religion was never more endangered, nor ever more corrupted, than by those who have been in greatest authority in that church; who ought to have understood religion best, and have been the principal support of it. Men may err, but God cannot: so that when God sends a prophet, or by his word does plainly declare his will to us, human example and authority ceaseth, and is of no force.

The last prejudice I shall mention, which the Jews had against our Saviour and his doctrine, was, that it did abolish and supersede their religion, as

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of no longer use and continuance, though it was plain it was instituted by God.

This had been a very specious pretence, indeed, had not this been part of their religion, and had not their own prophets foretold that the Messias should come, and perfect what was wanting and defective in their institution. It is expressly said in their law, that "God would raise unto them another prophet, like to Moses, and that they should hear him," when he came. So that, in truth, it was the accomplishment of all those revelations which were made to the Jews, and did not reprove the Jewish religion as false, but as imperfect; and did not contradict and overthrow, but perfect and fulfil the law and the prophets.

And thus I have gone over the chief exceptions and offences which the Jews took at our Saviour and his doctrine; and I hope sufficiently shewn the unreasonableness of them. I have not now time to proceed to what remains: but by what hath been said, you may easily see, upon what slight and unreasonable grounds men may be prejudiced against the best person and things, and yet be very confident all the while that they are in the right. For so, no doubt, many of the Jews, who opposed our Saviour and his doctrine, thought themselves to be. Therefore it concerns us to put on meekness, and humility, and modesty, that we may be able to judge impartially of things, and our minds may be preserved free and indifferent to receive the truths of God, when they are offered to us: otherwise, self-conceit and passion will so blind our minds, and bias our judgments, that we shall be unable to discern, and unwilling to entertain, the plainest and most evident truths. We see here, by the sad ex-

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ample of the Jews, that by giving way to passion, and cherishing pride and self-conceit, men may be so deeply prejudiced against the truth, as to resist the clearest light, and reject even salvation itself, when it is offered to them. So that is not in vain, that the Scripture saith, "Let every man be swift to hear, and slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God:" and exhorts us so earnestly, to "receive with meekness the word of God, which is able to save our souls."

END OF VOL. V.

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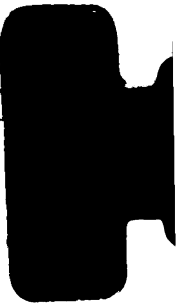

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